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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

MID-CHILDHOOD IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVES
ON ACHIEVING COLLEGE SUCCESS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

MARK J. LITWICKI

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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ABSTRACT

This study extends what is known about the experience of mid-childhood immigration. Fifteen participants, college students who immigrated to the U.S. from Latin America between the ages of 8 and 16 and who had completed at least a semester of transferable college-level coursework, provided their narratives by way of an open-ended interview focusing primarily on academic performance and achievement. Interviews were conducted using a life story methodology which seeks to maximize participant control over responses. Participants recounted their experiences from arrival through school completion and at college, and described which variables – circumstances, characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, events – they perceived as being most supportive of and most threatening to their academic success.

A broad and nuanced picture of the experience of mid-childhood immigrants emerged. Variables supporting academic success were seen to include a stable home setting (providing continuity during the tumultuous post-migration period), the motivational power of the *struggle narrative* (the memory of difficulties faced in connection with the migration experience), and participation in extracurricular activities and college bridge programs (which support acculturation and feelings of connectedness). Working against academic success were inconsistent mentoring and advising, a lack of reliable information about educational options, unevenly executed bilingual education upon arrival, and (for roughly half the participants) undocumented immigrant status.

Among the most striking of the findings is the substantial uniqueness of the mid-childhood immigrant identity and of the processes which contribute to the development of that identity as opposed to other immigrant and non-immigrant identities. Though diverse, mid-childhood immigrant identity involves key shared and particular characteristics. During the immediate post-migration period, participants experienced isolation and withdrawal due to the unfamiliar setting, a condition which served the protective function of preventing affiliation with unproductive or oppositional peer groups. Most reported structured engagement (i.e., in sports and other activities) which permitted the development of beneficial relationships and feelings of connectedness with the new academic and social communities. Though participants reported strong influences from both original and host cultures, this was not seen to be a source of particular distress. A view of mid-childhood immigrant identity emerges as defined by (a) *liminality*, inhabiting the space between cultural influences, and (b) *motility*, having the ability and tendency to move between those influences bidirectionally and intentionally.

Undocumented mid-childhood immigrants were seen to exhibit two striking and paradoxical characteristics: First, their inability to travel reduces the influence of the culture of origin while the length of residence encourages assimilation, resulting in a possible tendency to identify more strongly with the new culture despite being denied full membership; this is termed the *affiliation paradox*. Second, the increased difficulty they face due to their status has the effect of increasing the motivational power of the struggle narrative. Thus, the most significant hurdle to their success also becomes their most significant motivator, a phenomenon termed the *incentive paradox*.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

What is it like to live in two worlds? I wondered. What does this mean? How is it done? (Peshkin, 2000, p. 5)

Being an immigrant is seldom easy. Newcomers arrive needing to learn language, behaviors, attitudes, lifeways. Those who come as adults often face economic hardships, menial labor, a loss of social status. They take refuge in the solidity of the known, of identity firmly rooted in the past, memories of the homeland. Those who come as infants or small children are sheltered from much of the difficulty of adjustment; their refuge is the home, and their forays into the new and unfamiliar world come in small doses, holding tight to a parent's hand; gradually but in a startlingly short time they grow comfortable in the new place, the only place they really know (Harklau, 1998; Hoffman, 1989; Hutner, 1999; Portes & Zhou 1993; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

But those in the middle – the child, the young teen – certainly face the greatest challenge. As if later childhood and adolescence weren't trials enough, they endure these trials in unfamiliar and often unfriendly surroundings. With neither the comfort of solid knowledge of the old world nor the shelter of the nursery, they find scant refuge. School, the neighborhood, the larger community, society: Mid-childhood immigrants are thrust straight into an uncharted and intensely demanding new world with little or no experience, orientation, ability to communicate, or understanding of how to navigate (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999b; Hoffman, 1989; Roberge, 2003; Rumbaut & Ima,

1988). And yet – in spite of the challenges to succeeding in such circumstances – most manage the task. Many thrive. How do they do it?

Academic researchers have only begun to pursue, chronicle, and analyze the personal stories of this group; in fact, mid-childhood immigrants have only recently been identified and addressed as a subcategory worthy of particular attention (Harklau, 1998; Roberge, 2003). But another window on their world has long been available: Like many people who survive great challenges, mid-childhood immigrants have often taken pains to preserve their experiences in writing, experiences which they invariably report to be powerful and life-changing (Alvarez, 1999; Antin, 1912; Carnegie, 1920; Chao, 2001; Elmer-Dewitt, 1996; Hoffman, 1989; Paternostro, 1998).

Perhaps the most introspective and illuminating among these accounts is Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989), whose title reveals the central role that language played in her experience as an adolescent immigrant from Poland. Of her arrival as an adolescent in North America she writes:

On about the third night I have a nightmare in which I'm drowning in the ocean while my mother and father swim farther and farther away from me. I know, in this dream, what it is to be cast adrift in incomprehensible space; I know what it is to lose one's mooring. I wake up in the middle of a prolonged scream. The fear is stronger than anything I've ever known. (p. 104)

The challenging, sometimes traumatic, and invariably transformative experience of mid-childhood immigration has been cited by prominent individuals as diverse as U.S. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao (2001) and AIDS researcher David Ho (Elmer-Dewitt, 1996) as central themes in their life stories. Dominican-born author Julia Alvarez has written extensively on her experience as a mid-childhood immigrant in her essay

collection, *Something to Declare* (1999). New York-based journalist Silvana Paternostro placed her struggles as a teen immigrant from Colombia in an exploration of gender and sexuality in her *In the Land of God and Man* (1998). Mid-childhood immigrants bring their newcomer experience to bear on their adult lives as writers, educators, actors, and scientists, as recounted first-hand in recent compilations edited by Gordon Hutner (1999) and Ghanaian-born author Meri Nana-Ama Danquah (2000). These chronicles follow in the tradition of predecessors like Mary Antin (1912) and Andrew Carnegie (1920), both early-adolescent immigrants whose autobiographies tell of their assimilation into U.S. life in the late 19th century after arriving from Russia and Scotland, respectively.¹

Not surprisingly, the stories of mid-childhood immigrants reveal certain similarities, patterns, and recurring themes that researchers are also finding in emerging formal studies of this generation – questions of language, identity, isolation, connection, acculturation – beginning with the sense of utter displacement at such a sensitive stage of life, of unease, of being “cast adrift,” as Hoffman recalls, from the very first day at school: “We walk to our seats, into a roomful of unknown faces, with names that make us strangers to ourselves” (1989, p. 105). The otherwise buoyant Mary Antin (1912) wrote of her early experience as a child immigrant: “I want to forget... It is painful to be consciously of two worlds” (p. 2). Even the indomitable industrial titan Andrew Carnegie

¹ The accounts cited in this section are from published immigrant autobiographical accounts; for more see Wong (1991). Although the precedent exists for analyzing and interpreting such material as narrative data (Beverley, 2004), and Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) make a case for reflective autobiographical writing as a qualitative research method itself, the current study relies upon more customary interviewing techniques. Echoing Tierney (2003), the autobiographical accounts cited herein are intended to provide a context for the consideration of immigrant personal narrative while at the same time introducing (and perhaps giving further weight to) some of the major themes to be found in current academic literature.

(1920) described his mid-childhood immigrant experience as “bewildering” and admitted with uncharacteristic discomfiture, “It was years before I could feel the new land could be anything but a temporary abode” (p. 31).

Taking a cue from these accounts, this study is premised on a belief that the best source of data concerning the experience of mid-childhood immigration comes from the immigrants themselves. It seeks to include new voices, those of mid-childhood immigrants who are not yet so accomplished as to publish their own tales. It seeks to provide a venue for present-day mid-childhood immigrant college students who are well – but newly – along the path to college success, to enable them to make known their perspectives and insights on that transition.

If educators and policy makers are to judiciously chart a course of action for providing the best conditions for young newcomers to develop and prosper in their new homeland, to contribute amply and perhaps to lead, then a good starting place is to hear their stories and try to discern the lessons contained therein.

Background to the Study

Given historically high rates of college and university enrollment, it might be said that the United States today is in the midst of a great experiment in mass higher education. It is an experiment which recalls another of more than a century ago when public elementary (and later secondary) education became universal. And just as the emergence of mandated public schooling coincided with a historically massive wave of immigration, so has the emergence of widespread college attendance occurred during a period of immigration surpassing the Ellis Island era.

In that earlier era, few native-born citizens and even fewer immigrants dreamed of going to college. In the midst of today's "worldwide expansion of post-secondary enrollment" (Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, & Warschauer, 2003, p. 154), expectations have changed: many of today's young immigrants (and their parents) anticipate not only a high school diploma but also a college degree, presenting new challenges to colleges and universities, chief among them community colleges, which due to open admission policies, convenience, and low cost have emerged as the most prevalent starting point for immigrants entering higher education (Jones & Kauffman, 1994; Outcalt, Tobolowsky, & McDonough, 2000).

Today's immigrants are arriving not from Eastern and Southern Europe but mainly from Latin America and Asia; newcomers from Spanish-speaking America, with by far the largest contingent coming from Mexico, comprise the majority of new immigrants (Larsen, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Hispanics recently surpassed African Americans to become the largest minority population in the U.S., and their numbers are projected to increase to nearly a quarter of the total population by 2015 (Laden, 2001).

Of newcomers now entering higher education, many are mid-childhood immigrants. They began their schooling abroad, first encountered the English language during puberty or adolescence, and hold competing cultural affiliations. These individuals have in the past decade or so been identified as possessing distinct characteristics in comparison with both immigrants who arrive as adults, or "first generation" immigrants, and those who are born here or who arrive as small children, known as "second

generation” immigrants; as such, this middle group has been labeled the “1.5 generation” (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Mid-childhood immigrants are distinguished by duality, exhibiting traits common to both first and second generations, and by the outcomes of that duality, both positive (bilingualism, biculturalism, a broader and more nuanced worldview) and potentially negative (dislocation and loss).

Unfortunately, another characteristic observed in mid-childhood immigrants is a rate of high school and college completion which has been seen to be significantly lower than those of the other two groups (Garcia, 2001; Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005). For Latino immigrants, matters are complicated by the challenges inherent in their disproportionate likelihood of possessing limited economic means and coming from families with limited formal education (Harklau, 1998; Portes & Bach, 1985; Preto-Bay, 2004) as well as living in ethnic enclaves (Pessar, 1999; Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005). In addition, as this study revealed, many must endure the further difficulties related to undocumented immigrant status.

And yet in spite of these many challenges, every year large numbers of mid-childhood immigrants of all backgrounds achieve success at college. As will be seen in the following chapter’s review of literature, various researchers, educators and other observers have considered and postulated upon the question of how they manage this feat. The students themselves, however, have had precious little opportunity to contribute to this conversation – a deficit which the present study is intended to redress: The data sought hereby come directly from the students themselves. This study seeks to discover not how others perceive or interpret the situation, but how the students themselves

describe their journeys to college-level achievement, to what they attribute their persistence, and what they perceive as threats to it. The study is predicated on the belief that the study of successful students can reveal insight which could be fruitfully applied to the less successful, that a better understanding of the dynamics of immigrant student success – even despite the daunting odds mid-childhood arrivers can face – will be useful to educators who wish to help more such students persist and succeed in college.

Immigrants in U.S. Higher Education

It has long been held that the approach to educating a diverse society is distinctive in the United States: While higher education in most of the world have historically been reserved for a societal elite, America's dominant educational philosophy (though strenuously contested at times) has been the goal of quality education to all regardless of sex, color, creed, or culture (Ravitch, 1983). Since the acceptance of the common school ideal not long after the nation was founded, continuous pressures have arisen from many different sources for the realization of universal open access, not only for America's primary and secondary educational systems, but eventually for higher education as well (Tyack, 1974). Movement toward expanding access to higher education began to gain urgency in the latter-half of twentieth century, beginning with the massive and largely unforeseen ramifications of the "GI bill" or Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (United States Congress, 1944), which transformed the student profile in ways which profoundly altered the character of American higher education, opening the doors of academia to unprecedented numbers of students from varied socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. This trend was extended through such developments as the *Brown v. Board*

of Education decision (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 1954), the Civil Rights and Women's movements, Affirmative Action legislation, and government-sponsored student grants and guaranteed loans.

In the closing years of the twentieth century, and continuing through the start of the twenty-first, the student demographic in the United States has continued to change dramatically. Once again the catalyst was a shift in government policy which few predicted might have such far-reaching consequences for higher education. This policy was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (*Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act*, 1965), which lifted decades of restrictions which had kept immigration at a relatively low level since the 1920's and ensured that most immigrants came from Europe or Canada.

The result of the 1965 Immigration Act was that by the 1980's "immigration reached its highest point since the decade beginning in 1905" (U.S. Immigration & Naturalization Service, 1999, p. 136), with the large majority of new immigrants coming from non-European countries. Added to this was a similarly unprecedented level of unauthorized immigration, mostly from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia, with undocumented immigrants from a single country – Mexico – making up by far the largest portion. This trend was stoked by the 1986 Immigration Reform bill (*Simpson-Mazzoli Act*, 1986), which granted legal amnesty to millions of undocumented immigrants and – because of last-minute wording which effectively absolved employers of responsibility for determining the legal status of workers – facilitated the creation of a massive undocumented low-wage workforce (Schlosser, 2003). Between the 1990 and 2000

censuses, the population of foreign-born individuals in the United States, legally present and otherwise, increased by 54%, to a total of 30.5 million, coming to represent roughly 11% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Since that time, the most recent official pre-census reports estimate the foreign-born population at just under 38 million, representing roughly 12.6% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

A marked acceleration occurred in the rate of arrivals in the final years of the millennium, indicated in census data which demonstrate that while the influx of immigrants between 1990 and 2000 averaged roughly one million annually, the number of respondents to the 2000 census who were living abroad one year previous was more than two million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This growth trend abated somewhat in more recent years, and the total increase in the eight years since the last census is estimated to be roughly 8 million; according to the most recent census estimates, 29.5% of all foreign-born residents entered the U.S. after 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), though official figures will not be available until the 2010 census is completed. The age distribution of immigrants is also noteworthy: The share of total non-citizen immigrants who are of college age (15-24 years old) is approximately 10% higher than the proportion of natives in the same age group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

As of the 2000 census, three-quarters of new immigrants resided in just six states: California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In more recent years, however, immigrant populations have dispersed, bringing large populations of newcomers to states not previously seen as immigrant destinations; between 1995 and 2005 the states of Indiana, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee

all saw the numbers of nonnative English speakers more than triple (NCELA, 2008). Concentrations of immigrants – particularly from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America – create cultural and linguistic enclave environments in which native-born children can grow up with little knowledge of the language and the customs of the majority culture, a situation not seen on such a large scale since early in the twentieth century. This “linguistic isolation” is revealed in census data which indicate that although 38 million Americans (or 12.6% of the total) are foreign-born, 55.7 million speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008) – meaning that more than 15 million native-born Americans (roughly 5% of the total population) are growing up either bilingually or speaking little to no English. Latin Americans comprise the large majority of all non-natives in the U.S.; approximately 53% of all foreign-born residents originated in Latin America, with Mexico the largest sending nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

As noted above, this is not the first time that mass immigration has transformed social institutions in the United States. The influx of immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented major challenges to public education, and gave rise to significant changes in curricula, methods, and services. However, the impact of that historical population shift was limited to primary and secondary schools and came at a time when most students, immigrants or not, followed an educational path with rather practical objectives: to obtain the basic knowledge and skills for employment. The present-day cohort of immigrants is not only far larger than the previous one, it has arrived on the doorstep of American education at a time when increased access has meant

that these students need not stop with primary or secondary schooling.

Latino Immigrants at College

It is difficult to put a positive face on the situation of Latinos in American higher education. In a study of barriers to Hispanic student completion of baccalaureate degrees, Garcia (2001) observed, “Hispanic high school students are less likely to attain high school diplomas and Hispanic high school graduates are less likely to become college students. Then, at college, Hispanic freshmen are less likely to progress to the upper-division college curriculum and Hispanic third-year students are less likely to complete their baccalaureate requirements” (p. 8).

The degree of skills disparity between Latinos and non-minority students is alarming. Haycock, Jerald, and Huang (2001) reported that by mid-high school the academic level of typical Latino students is roughly at a par with White students four years behind them. The effect of this skills lag is reflected in academic achievement: Just slightly over half of Latino students graduate from high school within four years, and Latinos complete college at a rate less than half that of non-Latino Whites (Institute for Latino Studies, 2005). Within the past decade it has been calculated that Latinos between the ages of 25 and 29 complete college degrees at less than a third the rate of non-Hispanic Whites, and they drop out of school at double the rate of Blacks and four times that of non-Hispanic Whites (Paral, Ready, Chun, & Sun, 2004).

Explaining the academic deficit is a complex task. Latino immigrants have been identified as coming from economically disadvantaged classes and having limited formal education (Lipski, 2000; Lloyd, Tienda, & Zajacova, 2002; Portes & Bach, 1985; Portes,

McLeod, & Parker, 1978), both of which represent pressures against academic success. Academic performance can be further affected by living in ethnic and linguistic enclaves, and by the quality of public education in such communities (Paral, Ready, Chun, & Sun, 2004; Pessar, 1999; Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005). Arrival in the U.S. during mid-childhood further decreases the likelihood of academic success: Whereas Latino immigrant children “who arrived in the country prior to age eight are about as likely as US-born Latino students to graduate from high school and go on to college” (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005, p. 28), those who are eight or older when they immigrated are significantly less likely than their U.S.-born counterparts to finish secondary school and continue their studies at the college level. Other issues affecting immigrants and Latino newcomers especially are related to acculturation, identity, and family circumstances; these themes will be addressed at length in the following chapter.

The Study Community: An Urban Latino Gateway

The study focuses on students of an institution that shall be called here Gateway Community College (GCC), an urban community college serving the close-in “ring suburbs” of a large Midwestern U.S. city. There is little to suggest that this college is atypical among community colleges in analogous settings. Like many such communities in the Midwest and Northeast (and even Southern California), the area comprises what can be termed an urban rust belt, i.e., communities built around the heavy industrial corridors that arose with the expansion of American manufacturing in the twentieth century, extending along the rail lines, waterways, and highways that served to transport manufactured goods. This economic expansion reached its apex in the boom years of

American industry following World War II, but then began a precipitous decline in the 1960s and 70s as the major factories began to close and/or move their operations elsewhere, leaving behind very little employment or economic activity (Institute for Latino Studies, 2002).

The municipalities involved in this study were saved from the kind of extreme collapse seen in similar (and in some cases neighboring) areas by strong community cohesion (which had the ugly reverse face of racism and xenophobia), convenient access to the city center, and a location on major metropolitan transport routes. Nonetheless, by the 1990s declining home values and lack of job opportunities had pushed most of the earlier industrial-era inhabitants out.

At the same time, the area's low-cost housing, relatively central location, and transportation access made these close-in suburbs ideal as "gateway communities," and due to their location near earlier-established Latino communities, they became home to increasing numbers of Latinos. Like other immigrant groups before them, Latinos began a steady progression from the inner city toward the suburbs: While in 1980 only about a fourth of the Latinos in the larger metro area lived in the suburbs, by 2000 this had increased to around half (Paral et al., 2004). At the same time, the city and surrounding suburbs saw "triple-digit increases in the percentages of their residents who are Latino" (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005, p. 10), a population that is projected to more than double by 2025 (Institute for Latino Studies, 2002).

The communities served by Gateway Community College have the greatest concentration of Latinos in the metro area; of the two largest municipalities in the

college's district, over three-quarters of the population of one is Latino, of whom 88% are Mexican, and in the other the numbers are 38% and 81%, respectively (Institute for Latino Studies, 2002). The Latino population is much younger than the non-Latino population, as evidenced by enrollments in the local secondary schools, where Latinos comprised just over three-quarters of all students (76.8%); this percentage is likely to increase significantly in the near future, since at the elementary and junior-high level, Latino children comprise 95% of total enrollments in the district (ISBE, 2008).

Recent studies of the community (Institute for Latino Studies, 2002; Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005) found that among all the issues surveyed – crime, violence, health care, employment, transportation, education – the issue respondents rated of highest importance was education. Participants rated the importance of education almost 20 percentage points above any other issue, and Latinos rated it somewhat higher than non-Latinos.

Nonetheless, as in many immigrant gateway communities, public education in these municipalities is poorly funded and well below average in performance, remarkable even in a state that suffers extreme disparities in public education spending district to district (Orfield & Gaebler, 1991). A bipartisan tax policy think tank recently described Illinois as having “the most inequitable education funding system in the country, with per pupil spending ranging from a high of almost \$23,700 to a low of less than \$4,500” (Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, 2006, p. 1); the public schools in the study community fall squarely at the lower end of that spectrum (ISBE, 2008). Comparing figures on class sizes as well as faculty/staff/administrator-student ratios, all are

significantly less favorable in the primary and secondary schools of the study community than in non-minority schools in the larger metro area (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005). Even given the preceding data, academic outcomes of the largest sending school district in Gateway Community College's service area are startlingly poor: Fourteen of 17 schools have been placed on "Academic Watch Status," meaning they failed to meet state academic progress standards for four or more consecutive years; three-quarters of 11th-grade students in the district tested "below standards" in grade-level proficiency benchmarks in reading (74%), math (75%), science (76%) and writing (75%) as of 2008; and perhaps most disturbingly, these indicators have seen a marked and continuing trend of decline over the past decade (ISBE, 2008).

Gateway Community College

The college serves the communities described above as well as a handful of much smaller neighboring suburbs. The college is modest-sized and "landlocked" in an urban area where significant new construction and population growth are unlikely. Full-time enrollment equivalent in credit programs is just over 5,000, though the prevalence of part-time students (common in community colleges) brings the actual headcount to roughly 7,500. Large non-credit, grant-funded ESL and adult literacy programs housed on campus bring in an additional 3,000 students, though few of these matriculate into degree programs.

Like many similar institutions, Gateway Community College was originally established as a high-school-based night school for adults and expanded into a college during the junior college boom years of the 1960s. For the first half-century of its

existence, the college served a fairly homogeneous local population of third- and fourth-generation descendants of European immigrants. The student body consisted of a strong White non-Latino majority through the early 1990s. Since that time Latino enrollments have steadily risen, reflecting demographic changes in the community, and now Latinos represent just over 75% of the total (White non-Latinos are the second largest group, followed by smaller numbers of African-American, Asian, and Middle Eastern students).

College leadership was at first slow to react to this demographic shift, due perhaps to its rapidity and magnitude, to a lack of experience with such change, or even to a belief that the change was a passing phenomenon. In the early years of the new millennium, however, and under new leadership, the college went through a transformative period with the stated aim of better meeting the newly recognized needs of its community and student body. College personnel came to include substantial Latino representation at all levels, college signage and publications were made bilingual, and recruitment efforts were tailored to the Latino population. Having become an official Hispanic-serving institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2007), the college secured major funding from the federal Title V and TRIO grant programs. Initiatives funded through these grants included faculty training and campus events meant to develop appreciation and awareness of Latino culture, an academic “bridge” program for local high school students, and a new student success and tutoring center.

Overall, Gateway Community College is rather typical of contemporary community colleges serving immigrant gateway communities. Like similar institutions,

the college struggles with the competing pressures of limited funding, often problematic socioeconomic and community conditions, and academically underprepared students. As has been noted previously, attempting to carry out the project of higher education in such challenging circumstances on a large scale is a relatively new endeavor; there is as yet no reliable chart for navigating such waters.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study considers the experience of academically persistent mid-childhood immigrant students from Latin America who are enrolled in the community college.² The objective is to discover:

1. How do these students describe their experience from arrival in a new country during their school years, through school completion, and into a successful start at college?
2. In that experience, which variables – circumstances, characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, events – do the students perceive as being most supportive of their academic success?
3. Which variables do the students perceive as hindering or threatening their academic success?

Academic success here is defined as the completion of one semester of university-transferable courses, totaling 15 credit hours. Though this may seem a modest benchmark, it does indicate a solid footing in college and capacity to persist. Given that a

² For more detailed descriptions of the study participants, see “Characteristics of the Population” and “Sampling Techniques” in Chapter Three.

large percentage of entering community college students begin with remedial or developmental (i.e., non-transferable) coursework, the completion of a semester of transfer credit is for many individuals the culmination of two or more semesters of study. For first generation immigrants who are typically also first generation college students (and in many cases first generation high school or even elementary school graduates), this is a substantial accomplishment which bodes well for future achievement: Analysis of student retention data nationwide indicates that half of those students who drop out of college do so during the first year (Garcia, 2001).

The study entailed extensive interviews using an open-ended question interview protocol designed to find how participants perceived and characterized their experience and the characteristics, conditions, and/or circumstances that they believed supported or hindered their academic progress. The intent was to leave the door open as regards the scope of possible variables which might emerge from interviews, including identifying specific instructional or academic support modes as well as nonacademic variables related to the experience and life circumstances of mid-childhood Latino immigrants.

Study participants were Latinos (i.e., originating from Spanish-speaking Latin America) who immigrated to the U.S. from Latin America between the ages of 8 and 16 (see “Language, Literacy, and Academic Development” in Chapter Two for a discussion of the significance of age on arrival), who completed secondary school in the U.S. within five years of the initial interview (in order to mitigate variation due to length of residence), and who had completed a minimum of one semester (15 credit hours) of transferable college-level coursework.

Significance of the Study

In a comprehensive and influential analysis of the effects of immigration in the United States, Kennedy (1996) remarked that “there is no precedent in American history” for the influx and settlement pattern of Latino immigrants over the last two decades. This historic demographic shift will for the foreseeable future have profound repercussions on education in the United States. To anticipate the number of immigrants who will be entering postsecondary education, one might look at current trends in primary and secondary schools: The influx of nonnative English speakers, very predominantly immigrants, in K-12 schools between 1990 and 2005 more than doubled, from two million to five million, during a period when overall enrollments grew by roughly 20% (NCELA, 2006). Even if immigration dropped off precipitously, the number of immigrant students already in the pipeline is substantial. Among the most urgent challenges the U.S. now faces must be counted that of bringing this population into full participation in the society – a task which implies broad and fruitful participation in higher education.

Yet the participation of immigrants in this sphere has only recently begun to provoke serious comment. A decade ago, Gregory (1997) observed that the United States “now admits more immigrants annually than all the other developed nations in the world combined, yet many colleges and universities have not changed their orientation programs, student services, or faculty development programs to handle this extraordinary shift in the makeup of the U.S. population” (p. 26). Other researchers in immigrant education have noted that “we know little about how institutions are adjusting to the

increased participation of immigrants” (Gray, Vernez, & Rolph, 1996, p. 43), and lamented the “invisibility of immigrant educational issues” in higher education (Harklau, 1998, p. 638). Davies, Safarik, and Banning (2003) reviewed articles related to immigrants and other underrepresented groups in a major community college journal and found that of 65 articles, none addressed the question of those students’ persistence to achieve academic goals. In another broad review of the literature, Bailey and Weininger (2002) found “very little research that focuses particularly on the experience of immigrants in community colleges” (p. 361). The literature is also sparse at the lower educational levels, and in a recent broad survey of literature on the topic of immigrant students in primary and secondary schools, Goldenberg (2008) concluded regarding this population that “currently, there is no way to know the amount of support students receive or, most critically, the quality of the instruction and whether or not it is helpful for student achievement” (p. 11).

What is known about immigrants in higher education is seldom encouraging; as a subgroup, Latino immigrants seem to face an even more steeply pitched uphill struggle toward college completion than their non-Latino immigrant peers (Harklau, 1998; Institute for Latino Studies 2005; Lipski, 2000; Lloyd, Tienda, and Zajacova 2002; Portes & Bach, 1985; Portes, McLeod & Parker, 1978; Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005).

And within the Latino immigrant population is a substantial cohort of newcomers whose mid-childhood arrival has been found to compound the challenges they face in college (Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999a). Mid-childhood immigration has been seen to place Latino students in particular at greater risk of failing or dropping out before

completing any college work (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005), a circumstance which should signify a matter of concern to educators who would wish to encourage the success of diverse students.

That mid-childhood immigrants as a distinct group is increasingly perceived by educators to present unique challenges is affirmed by the recent upsurge of interest in the topic (Harklau et al., 1999a). Whereas a decade ago this cohort had only been mentioned in a small handful of journal articles, and academic database searches of peer-reviewed journals continue to turn up very limited resources, the topic has become evident in forums which allow for quicker turnaround, such as dissertations (e.g., Crosby, 2007; De Leon, 2005; Hinckle, 2006; Oudenhoeven, 2006; Senna, 2004) and at professional conferences. For one example of the latter, the annual conference of the international ESL/EFL professional organization, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), has in recent years seen the number of presentations and papers using the popular descriptor “generation 1.5” rise steadily from zero several years ago to more than a dozen in each of the past two years (TESOL, 2007; TESOL, 2008), while the 2010 TESOL conference introduced “generation 1.5” as an area of special interest. In a decade, the topic has gone from obscurity to among the most addressed, revealing that those who work most closely with this population feel that it merits particular study.

The characteristics, experiences, and perceptions of immigrants have been seen to play varying roles in influencing their success in college. Researchers have focused on the role of ethnic and racial identity (Horn & Ethington, 2002; Jenkins, Harburg, Weissberg, & Donnelly, 2004; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Ogbu, 1991; Senna, 2004;

Solórzano & Villalpando, 1999; St-Hilaire, 2002), family, community, and social networks (Alva, 1991; Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Solberg & Villarreal, 1997; Suárez, Fowers, Garwood, & Szapocznik, 1997), age on arrival (Cummins, 1981; Ramsey & Wright, 1974), language learning (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 1999; Foin & Lange, 2006; Harklau, 2003; Leki, 1999; Matsuda et al., 2003; Oudenhoeven, 2006; Preto-Bay, 2004; Reid, 1998; Roberge, 2003; Schwartz, 2004; Singhal, 2004; Thonus, 2003), attitude toward first language (Chiang & Schmida, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2003), attitudes toward school (Kaufman, 2004; Waxman, Huang, & Padron, 1997), and prior schooling experience (Medina, 2009; Padilla & Gonzalez, 2001), among others.

However, only a small handful of studies has focused on mid-childhood (or “generation 1.5”) immigrants specifically, and no study this researcher has unearthed has endeavored to provide a platform for individuals of this cohort – mid-childhood immigrants at college – to tell the stories of their own academic lives, their efforts and achievement, in an open-ended format and without preconceptions or predetermined categories. By entering into the conversation with no agenda beyond focusing on the question of academic success and what went into making it possible, it is hoped that this inquiry can enrich educators’ knowledge of how these students navigate and negotiate to and through college, and inform understanding of previous, related research. By recording how the respondents characterize their journeys, and by analyzing their accounts to discover illuminating themes and patterns, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of how mid-childhood immigrant students succeed. And it is hoped that this deeper understanding can, in turn, be used to better inform education policy and

programmatic decision-making.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Dynamics of Immigrant Student Achievement

Inquiry into the academic achievement of immigrant students has focused on variables such as adaptation/acculturation/assimilation to the dominant culture, family and community characteristics and the degree of influence these exert, the positive or negative influence of social identity, the student experience or observation of discrimination and perception of possibilities for social mobility, and student experience in schooling, particularly concerning English language acquisition. These factors operate in complex and dynamic ways – overlapping, interconnected, interactive, and sometimes counterintuitive – and their effects have been seen to differ from one ethnic/national group to another, among members of the same group in distinct contexts, and even simply from individual to individual. Immigrant students are not passively subject to environmental features which support or inhibit their success, but they often select and manipulate their circumstances, for better or worse.

The dynamics of educating immigrants have been studied at some length, beginning with early anthropological and sociological inquiries into the phenomena of cultural adaptation and continuing to more recent research focused on particular groups and subgroups (e.g., Asians, Latinos, Mexicans) and on the effects of particular characteristics of those groups and/or their backgrounds and/or certain characteristics of

their environments, and so on. Immigrants of color, for example, can face particular hardships arising from living in a society that is segregated and marked by inequality based on race and ethnicity. Due to their large and increasing numbers in this country, immigrants from Latin America and from Mexico in particular have drawn considerable attention from educational researchers and observers in the U.S.

Though the quantity of research on questions related to educating immigrants is robust, the large majority of such research has focused on primary and secondary education. A database search of recent literature on topics such as Latino students, student cultural adaptation, and bilingual education, for example, reveals only a small fraction of titles dealing with students at the tertiary level. In addition, until very recently very little study has focused specifically on “generation 1.5” or mid-childhood immigrants; of that, once again, only a small handful specifically addresses higher education.

This chapter presents a broad overview of the variables, processes, and pressures which have been seen to play a role in the likelihood of persistence and academic achievement among mid-childhood immigrant students. As the focus of this study is the Latino immigrant student, and specifically the mid-childhood immigrant, the review of literature concentrates on the characteristics of the immigrant student’s experience and those issues (e.g., adaptation, acculturation, second language acquisition) which are mostly unique to immigrants. However, many of the experiences and pressures that students in this group confront can be considered unique not in kind but rather in degree and distribution. Thus, although part of the literature considered here does not focus

specifically on immigrant issues or on Latinos, the inclusion and discussion of concepts and findings from that literature argue their relevance. Given the limited scope of material available which focuses expressly on mid-childhood immigrants, it is not practical to restrict the review to that level of specificity.

The Mid-childhood or “Generation 1.5” Immigrant

Demarcating immigrant categories as either first or second generation has always been an oversimplification, as it ignores the wide differences between individual experiences. While some newcomers retain their native language and customs almost exclusively and resist acculturation, others embrace the new with enthusiasm and leave the old behind without regret. Some children of immigrants are strongly oriented to their parents’ culture or language, whereas others become fully acculturated and have little understanding or appreciation of the “old country.” Nonetheless, the first/second generation dichotomy has long been in common use and as such has presumably been seen as useful.

However, during the historic influx of immigrants that occurred following the 1986 immigration reform, educators began to observe that certain immigrant youths, particularly at the high school and college levels, demonstrated traits that seemed characteristic of neither first nor second generations. Rumbaut and Ima (1988) coined the term “1.5 generation” to denote the group of students who arrive in the U.S. at school age or during adolescence (i.e., in the midst of their sociocultural and linguistic/literacy development). These young people, according to Rumbaut and Ima,

are neither part of the “first” generation of their parents, the responsible adults who were formed in the homeland [...] nor are these youths part of the “second” generation of children who are born in the U.S., and for whom the “homeland” mainly exists as a representation consisting of parental memories and memorabilia [...]. They are those young people who were born in their countries of origin but formed in the U.S. (that is, they are completing their education in the U.S. during the key formative periods of adolescence and early adulthood) [...] and they are in many ways marginal to both the new and old worlds, for while they straddle both worlds they are in some profound sense fully part of neither of them. Though they differ greatly from each other in cultural and social class origins, and in many other respects as well, they generally share a common psycho-historical location in terms of their age and their migration status/role, and in terms of developing bicultural strategies of response and adjustment to that unique position which they occupy as “1.5er’s” – in the interstices, as it were, of two societies and cultures, between the first and second generation. (pp. 1-2)

Though the earliest references to this cohort date back more than two decades, the mid-childhood immigrant in higher education research has made a notable appearance only very recently. This can be attributed to two circumstances: (a) Mid-childhood immigrants were simply not present in U.S. schools in large numbers until the historic influx of newcomers in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, and (b) the concept of a “generation 1.5” cohort as a unique subcategory of immigrants worthy of discrete attention only gradually became recognized and embraced. As is the case with most issues related to immigrant education, research on this cohort is far more robust at the primary and secondary levels than at the tertiary level.

A decade after Rumbaut and Ima coined it, use of the label “Generation 1.5” came into wide use by way of the first book to reference this phenomenon in its title, the influential *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition* (Harklau et al., 1999a), which addressed the challenges postsecondary educators face meeting the needs of this cohort. (Given the centrality of language to the immigrant’s struggle, it is perhaps not surprising

that said challenges were felt first and most acutely by college English teachers.) In a prologue to the book, Harklau, Losey, and Siegal (1999b) extended the discussion of how to define the group in question, positing that to consider only the generation of arrival is inadequate to describe a population which might also include students from parts of the U.S. which are culturally and linguistically distinct from the mainstream. Some students whose extremely limited English skills render them easy to mistake for recent immigrants turn out to be native-born in the U.S. but raised within linguistic/cultural enclaves here; others who demonstrate native-like linguistic and cultural cues may turn out to be relatively recent arrivers. With this complexity in mind, Harklau, Losey, and Siegal (1999b) attempted to cast a wider net by defining generation 1.5 immigrants in higher education as “bilingual U.S. resident students who enter U.S. colleges and universities by way of K-12 schools” (p. 1), a definition Harklau later further simplified by reducing the descriptor to “resident L2” students (where “L2” means second language speaker), while at the same time expressing the hope that the moniker generation 1.5 would continue to be “contested and unstable” (Matsuda et al., 2003).

Defined simply as second-language speaking residents, the cohort comes to encompass a broad spectrum of individuals, including any resident, non-native English speaker who attended U.S. schools, whether immigrant or not. This category would take in groups such as those Roberge (2003) has identified as “in-migrants” (e.g., from Puerto Rico), “native-born non-native speakers” or individuals raised within cultural/linguistic enclave homes or communities in the U.S., and “transnationals” or those marked by “complex patterns for back and forth migration” (p. 3). Not surprisingly, after suggesting

the broadest possible definition of generation 1.5, Harklau, Losey, and Siegal (1999b) concluded that the group thus described “may be too diverse, too particularistic in their backgrounds, needs and characteristics to hold under any single label” (p. 12).

Indeed, it seems to this researcher that such a broad definition of generation 1.5 encompasses a population with such widely varying characteristics that it makes little sense as a discrete category. The experience of a native-born non-native English speaker, particularly the circumstances of growing up as a lifelong cultural/ethnic minority and in an environment where the larger social context does not fully support linguistic/literacy development in the family language, differs enough from the immigrant’s experience to warrant separate discussion and investigation. Another practical argument against using “generation 1.5” to refer to a group which includes native-born individuals is the use of “generation” in the label itself, which makes a clear reference to an immigrant cohort.

For the purpose of this study, and in light of the issues delineated above, the label “generation 1.5” will be generally avoided in favor of the admittedly less elegant descriptor “mid-childhood immigrant.” This term has the advantage of requiring no further explanation to suggest the salient characteristics of the population of interest in this study: arrival in a new cultural/linguistic setting in the midst of childhood and up to early adolescence, which is to say during the course of primary or secondary school. Throughout this study, this is the cohort under consideration, and use of the label “generation 1.5” will be limited primarily to discussion of studies or commentaries whose authors showed a preference for the term.

From the global perspective, it might be noted that the mid-childhood immigrant

is in good company; in a 2003 colloquium, one of the foremost researchers of generation 1.5 (and popularizers of the moniker) placed these students in the larger context, noting that as there are roughly four times as many non-native English users in the world as natives, from a linguistic perspective “Generation 1.5 students constitute part of a global majority” (Matsuda, et al., 2003, p. 155).

Persistence, Resilience, and Retention

Numerous variables have been posited and studied as related to students’ fruitful pursuit of academic goals, a phenomenon described using terms such as persistence, resilience, student success, and retention. “Persistence” is the most general term, referring simply to the continuation of enrollment, the same phenomenon which viewed from the administrator’s perspective is called “retention”; Hawley and Harris (2005) observe that these two terms are commonly “used synonymously throughout the research” (p.120). “Success,” meanwhile, is generally used to suggest the reaching of an academic goal, such as passing a given class or a certain number of credits, or completing a certificate or degree.

Though the lines between are not distinct, the concept of “resilience” entails a somewhat narrower concept, that being persistence or success specifically in the face of particular challenges. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) define resilient students as those who “sustain high levels of achievement and motivation and performance, despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (p. 46). Given the academic and other pressures that mid-childhood immigrant students must confront, it may be accurate to view this group’s persistence in college as resilient

behavior.

Research on resilience in young people has revealed that the ability to thrive despite strongly adverse circumstances is common: Even among those students considered highly “at-risk,” more than two-thirds go on to productive and not abnormally troubled adulthoods (Benard, 2004). Resilience is seen to derive from characteristics such as skill at navigating social networks and solving problems, as well as a sense of purpose and the ability to think independently (Benard, 1993; Benard, 2004; Masten, 2001). Similarly, resilience in students has been seen to correlate with positive family influence (Comer, 1984; McMillan & Reed, 1994). What emerges from the great bulk of research on student persistence and success is that such depends upon characteristics of the individual in play with the academic setting and external factors, and that when individual traits and external settings are consonant with academic progress, progress will occur.

In much research it has been found that the individual student’s determination in regard to educational goals plays a key role in academic success. Waxman, Huang and Padron (1997) found that the most important factors affecting persistence in Latino middle school students were “academic aspirations, involvement, academic self-concept ... and satisfaction” (p. 137). The first of these – referred to using terms such as sense of purpose, educational aspirations, intent to persist, commitment to academic goals, and goal articulation – has consistently been shown as significant (Camburn, 1990; Heath, 1996; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Solis, 1995; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000). In a study of Hispanic student persistence, Solis (1995) considered such variables as motivation to

persist, commitment to attend, satisfaction with academic experience, commitment to school work, satisfaction with instruction, family support, and future job prestige, finding that only the first two (motivation to persist and commitment to attend) seemed significant. Voorhees and Zhou (2000) examined the variables affecting student success in community college and identified planning and goal-setting as most significant. Other research has demonstrated that being a good student in high school correlates with college success (Hawley & Harris, 2005; Willingham, 1985).

Language skills and the quality of earlier schooling have been linked with persistence as well. In a study of first-year students of a large urban community college, Hawley and Harris (2005) found that the strongest predictors of academic attrition included the students' need for developmental coursework and likelihood to express concern about their English skills, and that Black students and non-Mexican Latinos were more likely to persist than Mexicans. Hawley and Harris surmise that this attrition rate may be because the Mexican students are "not as integrated into the Latino support structure as are other Latino students." Students who had heavy responsibilities and activities outside the college environment, to an extent which inhibited social integration into the academic setting, also showed higher attrition. The most important predictor of student persistence, Hawley and Harris found, was related to student educational expectations and their ability to turn those expectations into plans, as well as the ability to accurately gauge (and presumably counter) those external factors which are likely to impede academic success.

Culture, Ethnicity and Immigrant Student Success

In a splintered society, what does one assimilate to? Perhaps the very splintering itself. (Hoffman, 1989, p. 197)

Any discussion of culture and its effects on student outcomes ought to begin with the admonition to “be careful not to see culture as monolithic or deterministic” (Matsuda et al., 2003, p. 168). Latinos and Latin Americans, specifically, are commonly considered as a singular entity, which of course they are not; as much diversity obtains between Venezuela and Chile as between Germany and England, and cultural differences can be as strong between Mexicans from different regions of the country as they are between New Yorkers and Californians or Honshu and Kansai Japanese. Regardless of region, highly urbanized individuals from any country may have more in common with their big-city peers abroad than either group has with their rural compatriots.

Despite the cultural diversity among those of Latin American origin, and despite the varying approaches to analysis and a wide spectrum of theoretical approaches that researchers have employed in studies of them, certain commonalities in the reported experience of Latin American immigrants seem to emerge. In interviews with scores of immigrant students from Mexico, Benmayor (2002) found that as a group they “express emerging claims for cultural citizenship,” while Gonzalez, Plata, Garcia, Torres, and Urrieta (2003) presented generation 1.5 Latino student “testimonios” about their educational experiences, revealing a variety of themes other researchers have identified feelings of displacement (“I was an outsider,” p. 236), disillusion, racism, language challenges (“the one thing that hurt me the most and that separated me from everybody was language,” p. 239); the pivotal role of family (“transition was difficult due to the

obstacles my mother put in my way,” p. 240), the ill effects of disrupted schooling, and the benefit of bilingual classes (“I was able to feel confident again,” p. 240). These themes are addressed further in the succeeding subsections.

Bean and Stevens (2003) categorized the diversity of variables and issues affecting the lives of cultural/linguistic newcomers – acculturation, assimilation, newcomer optimism, ethnic and cultural identity, and cultural consonance/dissonance – under the heading of “incorporation,” encompassing “the broader processes by which new groups establish relationships with host societies” (p. 95). Incorporation as an umbrella concept is useful because of its broad embrace as well as its neutrality, in that it seemingly avoids suggesting a value judgment in regard to the larger process it names or the subsidiary processes contained within, processes which themselves are often subject to strenuous debate.

Newcomer Optimism and the Dual Frame of Reference

Being a newcomer can bring benefits as well as challenges. A new environment can energize people with the prospect of a brighter future which was perceived to be impossible in the old environment. For new immigrants, the ability to contrast their present circumstances with those they left behind can offer a sustaining optimism. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) found that immigrants commonly express a sense of optimism and the belief in a better future, a future that they see as best prepared for by schooling. This group thus holds a favorable attitude toward continued education. Fueling new immigrant optimism is what Suárez-Orozco (1989) terms the “dual frame of reference” – they can compare their present situation with that in the “old country,” and

see the relative opportunities that the present offers. Matute-Bianchi (1991) found a strong connection between academic success in immigrant students and their ability to perceive connections between education and other areas of life, particularly employment opportunities. Newcomer optimism most acutely influences immigrants with a clearer sense of the relative availability of opportunities in the new setting; for younger immigrants and those with limited contact with and understanding of the sending country, this effect can be mitigated.

Acculturation and Assimilation

The terms acculturation and assimilation denote closely related notions, though making a clear distinction between the two is rarely attempted. Pizarro and Vera (2001) defined assimilation as “the end result of complete acculturation, whereby individuals lose all traces of their ethnic heritage and become indistinguishable from the dominant group” (p. 93). It may be helpful to consider difference between the concepts as akin to that between simile and metaphor: the difference between *being like* something and *being* that thing. Pizarro and Vera also caution, however, that assimilation “does not imply that the outside world or society sees the individual as indistinguishable from the majority” (p. 11) – a reality which can take on particular significance in the case, for example, of undocumented immigrants.

Among recent newcomers, acculturation may serve as a mechanism which limits counterproductive tendencies such as loneliness and alienation, thus having a positive effect on academic success. Solberg and Villarreal (1997) found that for Hispanic students, level of acculturation was among the key variables linked with avoiding distress

and successfully transitioning to college life. Similarly, the lack of acculturation has been seen to correlate with negative academic influences; Suárez, et al. (1997) found strong biculturalism to be the best predictor of Hispanic students' feelings of alienation in college, while Senna (2004) examined the function of strong ethnic identity among generation 1.5 immigrants as an impediment to learning English.

Weak acculturation, by encouraging maintenance of close ties with the sending community, can also work against success if such ties provide a conduit for negative messages about the new culture from back home. A slim volume titled *La cara oculta de la inmigración* (The dark side of immigration) (Maza, 1998) is an example of popular reading material in what is presently the largest sending nation, Mexico. The book's first chapter, titled "Estados Unidos: decadencia moral y racismo," would be unlikely to foster positive feelings toward the new environment, nor to motivate a newcomer to put his best effort into it. With ready access to news media on the internet, immigrants can be as easily influenced by distant perspectives as those from their new community.

The relationship between acculturation/assimilation and academic outcomes remains unclear. At apparent variance with Solberg and Villarreal (1997) and Senna (2004), other researchers have found a correlation between strong ethnic identity and academic success (Suárez-Orozco, 1987; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Rumbaut, 1995). However, this is not to suggest that ethnic identity necessarily implies rejection of the new culture. Matute-Bianchi (1991) found that Latino students who adopted a self-image in opposition to the dominant culture were less academically successful than those who did not. Ethnic identity associated with students' connection with their linguistic heritage

has been seen as holding positive implications for learning, as a solid grounding in the mother tongue is generally seen to support acquisition of the second language (August & Hakuta, 1997; Hakuta, 1986; St-Hilaire, 2002).

Portes and Zhou (1998) posited that adopting the “outlooks and cultural ways of the native-born” may in some instances hinder social and economic advancement by distancing young people from the “material and social capital their communities make available” (p. 496). For those who do acculturate, “the anti-intellectual climate of U.S. adolescent culture” can negatively affect immigrant students’ attitudes toward school (Leki, 1999, p. 23), while acculturation itself has been seen anecdotally to provoke feelings of renunciation and alienation among immigrants (Hutner, 1999). Supporting the argument that increased assimilation can diminish academic success – at least in the case of some Latino students – are a number of studies which have suggested that immigrant students from Mexico often demonstrate higher rates of academic success than native-born Mexican Americans (Nielsen & Fernandez, 1981; Padilla & Gonzalez, 2001; Rumbaut, 1995), and that length of residence in the U.S. correlates with lowered educational aspirations (St-Hilaire, 2002).

Studying how young immigrants manage to navigate the complex interplay between potentially negative and positive effects of assimilation, Portes and Zhou (1998) posited what they termed “segmented assimilation,” a much-cited model which accounts for wide variation in adaptation paths, from aspiring to the normative middle class to adopting the values of an oppositional or criminal underclass to maintaining the traditional culture of the country of origin. The most resilient immigrants, according to

this model, are those which most effectively manage the process of assimilation so as to reap the benefits while minimizing possibly negative tendencies. This hypothesis is supported by Baca, Bryan and McKinney (1993), who in a study of 118 Mexican immigrant high school graduates found that academic success seemed to correlate not with length of residence, language proficiency, family support or educational attainment, schooling abroad, or peers, but merely with an otherwise unaccounted-for academic orientation: The only commonality among successful students was that they could be characterized as “being into school” (p. 37). Baca, Bryan and McKinney also described later-arriving students as being spurred on by an awareness of “the hardships their families faced in coming to the United States” (p. 37), calling to mind Suárez-Orozco’s “dual frame of reference” (1989).

In reaction to the growing population of immigrants entering U.S. schools in the early 1980s, a body of literature emerged which posits a strong relationship between cultural compatibility and student success; that is, if the educational setting and home setting can be made more culturally similar, academic achievement is enhanced. In contrast to earlier (and generally discredited) approaches to ameliorating cultural dissonance by encouraging abandonment of “foreign” cultural practices (and even language usage) at home, as was commonly seen at mid-century (Hoffman, 1989; Rochlin, 1997; Rodriguez, 1981), proponents of this later movement (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Trueba, 1988) encouraged changes in the school environment such as bilingual education and cultural validation, an approach predicated on the assumption that a lack of cultural dissonance between the school and student would support success.

The Effects of Family and the Community

Reflecting on a series of studies undertaken on the urban Latino communities in which the present inquiry is to be conducted, Ready and Brown-Gort (2005) observed that among Latinos, the “family has a powerful influence on its members, and familial ties and loyalties probably exert an influence that is even more powerful than is typically observed in many non-Latino families” (p. 26). The effects of this influence can be mixed, as the combination of lower socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, and limited parental education have been seen to correlate with lower educational achievement in school which, rather than mitigating over time seems to grow more pronounced (Lloyd et al., 2002; Miller, 1995; Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Rendon and Valadez (1993) found that family, financial circumstances, understanding of the educational system, and cultural information all could negatively affect Latino students’ enrollment in college, as well as the relationships between the students’ secondary schools (often in low-income enclaves) and receiving colleges. Considering mid-childhood immigrants specifically, Preto-Bay (2003) lamented that the lack of “a family history of academic participation [and] strong social networks in post-secondary education” often leads generation 1.5 students to “mismatched education and disappointment” (p.112).

Academic success may be greatly affected by the degree of consonance between students’ home and school lives. Alva (1991) found that resilient Mexican-American students tend to feel more encouraged by their families in their educational pursuits, enjoy coming to school, and have fewer conflicts within the family and with other

students.

School-related social networks and general satisfaction with school can provide essential advantages to immigrant and other at-risk students. Horn and Chen (2002) found that secondary students whose friends had plans for post-secondary studies were six times more likely to pursue higher education than those without this social influence. Similarly, Napoli and Wortman (1998) found that individuals who enjoyed close relationships with peers at college and found school enjoyable were more likely to persist. Reyes and Jason (1993) observed a strong correlation between academic resilience of Hispanic students and the students' satisfaction with school. Stanton-Salazar (1997) posited that minority students are at a disadvantage because they do not tend to inhabit social networks which provide cultural knowledge to help them navigate the complexities of the educational system. Latino immigrant students in particular may face additional challenges, as low overall academic success rates among their peers – just over half of Latinos graduate from high school within four years, and they complete college at a rate less than half that of non-Latino Whites (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005) – may lead to diminished expectations among newcomers within the community, and reduces the instance of favorable examples and knowledgeable mentors.

Family socioeconomic status has commonly been implicated in student achievement; McKay and Wong (2000) note that immigrants from lower economic class backgrounds demonstrate lower educational attainment than native-born persons of a given ancestry, a phenomenon which has been seen in newcomers from Latin America, from Southeast Asia, from Asia, and from Eastern Europe. SES has even been seen to

trump the significance of language skills, with non-native speakers from higher-income families outperforming even native speakers from more modest backgrounds (Krashen & Brown, 2005). But those who fare the worst are non-natives of limited economic means. Almost one quarter of Mexican and Central American immigrants in the United States live below the poverty level, more than double the levels of the U.S.-born population (just over 11%), and substantially higher than that of immigrants from other parts of the world, which range from 9 to 11% (Goldenberg, 2008).

Living in highly-concentrated ethnic and linguistic enclave communities, as many Latino immigrants do, has been observed to have a detrimental effect on individuals' development of skills in the dominant language and culture (Pessar, 1999; Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005). The quality of public education in such communities is also subject to question: "Children in highly segregated Latino communities, many of whom are among those with the greatest needs, are often clustered into under-resourced, high-poverty schools that too often have not met the expectations of residents" (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005, p. 15). Unfortunately, for many immigrants residence in concentrated ethnic enclaves seems inescapable, not only for reasons of economics and convenience but also possibly due to intolerance in the larger society. Pessar (1999) posited that "discrimination against U.S. immigrants in both the housing and labor markets [...] limits the ability of more established immigrants to move beyond" ethnic enclaves (p. 61); this has been seen as particularly marked in the case of undocumented immigrants (Mahler, 1995).

Language, Literacy and Academic Development

Language proficiency is commonly mentioned as the most significant variable affecting immigrants' success in higher education (Ellis, 1999; Gray et al., 1996; Gregory, 1997; Harklau, 2003; Matsuda et al., 2003; Ward, 1997), and several researchers specifically identify academic writing as a "make-or-break" competency which is often implicated in the non-persistence of mid-childhood immigrants at college (Harklau et al., 1999a; Roberge, 2003; Vásquez, 2007). Although the language demands of a given course of study can influence the likelihood of success of any student, nonnatives are particularly affected. In a study of nonnative university students, Dee and Henkin (1999) found that "student performance tended to decline as the linguistic proficiency requirements for coursework in the major increased" (p. 61). Larsen (2007) studied a group of generation 1.5 college students and found they arrived with "very little knowledge of the requirements of academic writing" (p. 1); though the study spanned only one semester, Larsen saw improvement and held out hope for the students' eventual academic success. However, Crosby (2007) echoed Leki (1999) and Vasquez (2007) in finding that despite motivation and hard work, limitations in generation 1.5 students' academic literacy skills presented often insurmountable obstacles in their paths to academic success.

In addition to its effect on academic success, language proficiency has also been seen to play a central role in cultural adjustment among nonnatives in studies of recent migrants (Charles & Stewart, 1991; Mohr, 1994; Schweers, 1993). Tomich, McWhirter and King (2000) went further, positing on the basis of an extensive review of literature,

and referencing Sewell and Davidson (1961), that language is the primary factor in the adaptation of newly-arrived students, and that “even among a group with strong command of the host country’s language, those with greater English language facility demonstrated better overall adjustment” (p. 38).

Age on Arrival and the Linguistic Profile

It has been robustly demonstrated that for students who arrive after the age of six to be near to linguistic par with native speakers in an academic setting requires in most individuals roughly five years of language exposure and study (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 1999; Leki, 1995, 1999; Ramsey & Wright, 1974). Just as mid-childhood immigrant students may have limited cultural orientation to the country of origin, they also have limited literacy in their native language, having typically left the native language setting before achieving linguistic mastery. Unlike those who immigrate as adults, most mid-childhood immigrants never attain adult native proficiency in the mother tongue, and during the crucial developmental stages of puberty and adolescence they lag far behind their native-speaker peers in developing literacy skills in English; they are, in effect, in the process of gaining academic skills in one language while losing another they never really mastered (Harklau, 2003; Thonus, 2003).

A commonly observed characteristic of the language skills of mid-childhood immigrants is that they tend to have an unbalanced skills profile, with relative strength in conversational ability (particularly in informal registers) and listening comprehension, but marked weakness in reading and writing skills (Harklau, 2003; Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999b). Despite the proliferation of ESL courses in primary and secondary

schools (or perhaps as an indictment thereof), it is observed that the most significant source of language input for these students is aural; generation 1.5 students are often referred to as “ear” learners (Foin & Lange, 2006; Matsuda et al., 2003). Reid (1998) noted how these learners differ from international students or new immigrants in that they “acquired English principally through their ears: They listened, took in oral language (from teachers, TV, grocery clerks, friends, peers), and subconsciously began to form vocabulary, grammar, and syntax rules, learning English principally through oral trial and error” (p. 4). Students who learn this way tend to lack a “metalinguistic” ability to talk about language (i.e., using grammatical terminology), since unlike those who learn English as a foreign language or who immigrate after achieving first-language literacy and study English as a true second language, mid-childhood immigrants often do not learn English in a structured and academic way (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999b).

A challenge educators face when working with mid-childhood immigrants is that in conversation they often appear to have near-native fluency, leading advisors and teachers to make inaccurate assumptions about their academic language skills. Linguist Jim Cummins (1981) articulated this phenomenon in a highly influential article in which he re-visited a handful of large studies of immigrants in Swedish and Canadian schools; Cummins posited a continuum between the kind of informal, conversational fluency immigrant children can acquire within a few years of arrival, which he labeled “basic interpersonal communication skills” (BICS) to the much more sophisticated level of cognitively-demanding language skills necessary for longer-term academic success, which he termed “cognitive academic language proficiency” (CALP). Cummins cited

persuasive studies which indicate that basic speaking/listening skills correlate very weakly with both IQ and cognitive competency (Ekstrand, 1977; Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukomaa, 1976), concluding that BICS is a poor predictor of CALP. Nonetheless, educators' impressions as well as recommendations and placements can be strongly influenced by the basic speaking/listening skills a student demonstrates in an informal advising interview.

Cummins (1981) found that although a child's age on arrival is a significant predictor of later English proficiency, this is mostly a function not of age but of simply having more time to develop language skills. However, his analysis supported an earlier study (Ramsey & Wright, 1974) in the finding that there is a significant distinction between students who arrive before the age of six or seven and those who arrive later. The younger cohort tends to reach grade norms quickly and maintain them, whereas among those who arrive after the age of six or seven, a higher age on arrival correlates with speedier attainment of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). That is, it is easier for late-adolescent or young adult students to apply cognitive skills previously attained in the first language to tasks in the second language than for younger students to develop those crucial cognitive skills while simultaneously learning English. (Baca, Bryan and McKinney [1993] and Suárez-Orozco [1989] attributed this phenomenon to cultural rather than linguistic characteristics.)

Just as low-CALP mid-childhood immigrants may be inaccurately placed due to strong basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), immigrants can also be misplaced in the other direction due to superficial linguistic inaccuracies. For example, it is

common for older immigrants to exhibit more or less permanent (“fossilized”) though often inconsequential language characteristics, especially evident in written form, which mark them as nonnatives; this often leads them to be inaccurately labeled “ESL” learners and placed into classes with newly arrived immigrants when they reach college (Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999b; Valdes, 1992; Ward, 1997). Roberge (2003) identified this failure to distinguish between “true ESL” learners (that is to say, foreign students and new immigrants) and generation 1.5 – and the consequent placement of the latter students into inappropriate courses – as a serious lapse on the part of educators. Various observers have noted that for educators to expect monolingual-like language features among students who live in linguistically diverse environments (and in a multilingual nation) may be unrealistic and even unjust (Silva, Leki, & Carson, 1997; Valdes, 1992; Ward, 1997). Such admonitions have little effect, however, on the preconceptions of many teachers and others with whom non-native students must interact.

Attitudes toward First and Second Languages

When considering the question of second language acquisition, it is important to keep in mind the reality that language is not merely a tool of communication but also a vessel of culture and identity. It is indeed difficult to overstate the significance of language. Chicana essayist Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) commented, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language” (p. 81), and researchers and other observers have found that for many individuals the line demarcating language and culture can be indistinct: in a large-scale study of students of non-English language background in California, Chiang and Sumida (1999) found that “in many instances, language for

these students is being used as a synonym for culture” (p. 85).

Language is universally used to establish group cohesion and to identify and exclude outsiders; those who do not speak the majority language are often viewed as not just linguistically distinct but defective and unworthy of the standards of fairness or equality which are afforded the majority. The biblical tale of the 42,000 unfortunate Ephraimites whose “defective” pronunciation of *Shibboleth* condemned them to death at the hands of the linguistic purists of Gilead (Judges 12:5-6) is reflected in more contemporary cases: In Bosnia during the 1990s, slight linguistic differences were used to distinguish (with the purpose of exterminating) those of different ethnic/cultural groups (Maass, 1997), while in the Dominican Republic, suspected illegal Haitian immigrants are reportedly asked to name the parsley plant, as the Spanish word, *perejil*, is difficult for francophone Haitians to pronounce; identified by their accent, they can be deported, beaten, or worse (Obejas, 1998). At all levels within and between distinct social and societal groups, the ways people use language can mark either affiliation or exclusion.

The irrevocable connection between language and identity means also that inhabiting a different language can profoundly alter a person’s sense of self. Chronicling her own experience as a mid-childhood immigrant and her fitful yet inexorable internalization of the culture and language of the United States, journalist Eva Hoffman (1989) wrote: “Eventually, the voices enter me; by assuming them, I gradually make them mine. *I am being remade*, fragment by fragment, like a patchwork quilt; there are more colors in the world than I ever knew” (p. 220, emphasis added).

Even immigrant students who achieve full proficiency in the language of their

adopted homeland often report a lack of connection with the language. For immigrant students with several years' residence in the U.S., the primary language of literacy as well as the most commonly used language socially (outside of the home) is typically English; however, even such individuals profess that they have little confidence in their English skills (Harklau, 2003), or that despite their fluency they do not feel that the language is really their own (Chiang & Schmida 1999), though these findings do not address the relationship between identification with the language of instruction and academic success. Students' attitudes toward their first language may affect their development of skills in the second. Jimenez (1997) found that Hispanic middle school students who saw their native language as detrimental to their learning showed less improvement than their peers who had positive attitudes toward their first language and who perceived their first and second languages as connected.

Cognitive Development

Teachers who work with mid-childhood immigrants at the post-secondary level often observe that there is something different about these students that goes beyond cultural issues or the linguistic profile, and has to do with essential cognitive characteristics, specifically with apparent difficulties engaging in complex abstract thinking. This is a little-discussed phenomenon; until very recently this researcher's belief in its existence was based only upon pervasive anecdotal evidence gleaned over two decades working with G1.5 students and their teachers, together with a general understanding of adolescent cognitive development and the role that language and culture play in that development. The dearth of discussion in formal academic media may be

incidental, or may reflect a taboo against the suggestion that mid-childhood immigration might have deleterious long-term effects on cognitive development, a suggestion which given the size of the population in question is disturbing to say the least. Nonetheless, if it is indeed possible that mid-childhood immigration, and more specifically the way K-12 schools deal with newly-arrived students, can adversely and perhaps permanently affect cognitive development, then we as educators have a real obligation to explore how this works and how we can mitigate negative outcomes.

Since achieving academic-level proficiency in a new language takes most learners approximately five years (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1981; Leki, 1995; Ramsey & Wright, 1972), the tasks which new immigrant students are asked to perform in school very often far exceed the capacity of their linguistic skills in the new language. In a study of generation 1.5 students, Hinckle (2006) observed that “students who do not learn academic skills in their native languages are more likely to fall seriously behind as they struggle not only to learn English but also to acquire the requisite academic skills to succeed in middle school, high school, and beyond” (p. 41). To a significant (though presumably diminishing) degree throughout the initial years after arrival, any instruction delivered in the newly-arrived student’s second language can be only partially comprehended; describing her experience as a mid-childhood immigrant, Hoffman observed: “Much of what I read is lost on me, lost in the wash and surf of inexactly understood words” (p. 180). Students in this circumstance are thus at a disadvantage in regard to the amount of new language-based information they can acquire and, as such, in regard to the amount of cognitive development they can engage in based upon that new

information. Carson (1993) and Flower (1990) addressed the intrinsic role of dealing with increasingly complex language tasks in cognitive development among second language learners; Blanton (1999) made reference to this in her discussion of language minority students' difficulty with developing "critical literacy" due to limitations in their understanding of texts. Preto-Bay (2004) described generation 1.5 students who "fall behind as they struggle to make sense of knowledge they have neither the conceptual basis nor the language to negotiate" (p. 97). Leki (1995), Spack (1997), Vásquez (2007), and Crosby (2007) all described case studies which substantiate the ultimately negative outcome of disrupted late-childhood literacy development on immigrant students' academic success at college, where the coping strategies which sufficed to counterbalance cognitive and linguistic shortcomings through K-12 schooling are no longer enough.

Preto-Bay (2007) discussed the relation between childhood literacy and cognitive development among generation 1.5 students, referencing the work of sociolinguist Jenny Cook-Gumperz (1986), who defined literacy as "a metacognitive process that makes other cognitive and social developments possible" (p. 3). Preto-Bay expresses concern about students whose "inadequate literacy preparation in the K-12 system" can impede college success, as literacy plays "a pivotal role in the cognitive development of students" (p. 99). Recall also the findings of Cummins (1981), described in the previous section, that immigrant students who arrive later – having the advantage of uninterrupted cognitive development by way of schooling in the mother tongue through most or all of adolescence – tend to attain grade norms more quickly than those whose cognitive

development is affected by the disruption of entering a new sociocultural and linguistic setting.

Questions of how interrupted cognitive-linguistic development might affect longer-term academic achievement are as yet unsettled, but what is known is enough to suggest a troubling picture to educators of lower-literacy mid-childhood immigrants at the post-secondary level, where most such students are well beyond adolescence.

The Academic Setting

The ability to adapt to the cultural setting of U.S. higher education can be crucial to a generation 1.5 student's success. Just as cognitive and linguistic competence can strongly affect immigrant students' academic achievement, competence in the area of sociocultural knowledge – particularly an understanding of the academic culture of U.S. higher education – is seen to be significant. Whether immigrant or not, a significant part of any student's project in higher education is a process of acculturation specifically into academe, a process of development which amounts to the gradual “construction of academic identity” (Matsuda, 2003, p. 168); in the case of the immigrant student, this process is overlaid upon – and probably complicated by – the more general one of immigrant incorporation. Preto-Bay (2004) noted that for many native-born students, the academic setting represents “a social and cultural context which closely resembles the kind of home environment and activities which characterize their parents' and their cultural and social background, values, and activities” (p. 90); such students have a clear advantage over their non-native classmates in this regard. It has been argued that to force nonnatives to adhere to the norms of American education is destructive of their cultural

folkways and a form of tyranny (Harklau, 1998).

The effectiveness of schooling on children is in part a question of how well their family backgrounds and home behaviors support their educational efforts, and in part a question of the quality of the schools; the latter variable is, in turn, determined to a large degree by school funding. And in the United States, school funding is typically linked to the socio-economic characteristics of the community. Generation 1.5 students, and in particular Latinos, have been seen to disproportionately occupy lower socio-economic status and come from families in which educational attainment is severely limited (Harklau, 1998; Portes & Bach, 1985; Preto-Bay, 2003), and who tend to settle in immigrant gateway communities marked by some degree of linguistic and cultural segregation from the dominant “outside” society (Institute for Latino Studies 2005; Pessar 1999; Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005), all of which has been seen to affect academic success negatively. In the context of U.S. public school funding, such communities typically suffer the “double-whammy” of lower property values which translates into lower educational funding, and higher population density per household which translates into more children in schools. This has been seen in Latino enclave settings, noted for “under-resourced, high-poverty schools that too often have not met the expectations of residents” (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005, p. 15). Most observers have identified Mexican and Central American immigrants as coming from backgrounds marked by economic and educational scarcity (Lipski, 2000; Lloyd, Tienda, & Zajacova 2002; Portes & Bach, 1985; Portes, McLeod & Parker, 1978), representing further pressures against academic success.

Added to this are the challenges of particular academic needs based on second language status and interrupted and/or inadequate or disrupted formal schooling (Portes & Bach, 1985; Portes, McLeod & Parker, 1978) or what Harklau, Losey and Siegal term “significant interruptions in precollegiate schooling” (1999, p. 10). The academic needs of generation 1.5 students can be further complicated by emotional consequences of the experience of involuntary migration, a circumstance which can include traumas such as fleeing conflict zones, passing through refugee centers, and repeated or patterned migrations (Hamayan, 1994).

Community College and Immigrant Students

Most immigrant students begin their studies in community colleges – colleges which were established and evolved to meet the needs of a very different sort of student, that culturally homogeneous student of the early period of mass higher education from the early 1970s through the 1980s. Across the country, and especially in urban immigrant “gateway communities,” these institutions are now struggling mightily with the challenges of meeting the needs of student populations of increasingly diverse backgrounds and helping them to achieve academic success comparable to the level of the previous generation.

The two-year college, with generally open-access admissions and a strong emphasis on developmental language support, has come to represent a valuable entry point into higher education for Hispanics as well as for other minority and non-native English-speaking students (Hu & St. John, 2001; Jones & Kauffman, 1994; Outcalt, Tobolowsky, & McDonough, 2000; Solis, 1995). Although the prevailing view is that

college provides minority students a valuable pathway to social and economic mobility (e.g., Gandara, 1994) and serve as a valuable conduit to four-year institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 1996), others have outlined more uncertain views. In a study of minority high school students and counselors, Outcalt, Tobolowsky, and McDonough (2000) described sometimes contradictory perspectives toward community colleges.

Discussion of success among community college students is complicated by “the ambiguous nature of the successful community college experience” (Bailey & Weininger, 2002, p. 6), since many students view the two-year college as a temporary stepping stone and intend only to pick up a certain number of credits before transferring to a four-year school, some who initially state an intention to complete an associate’s degree but after obtaining a semester or more’s credits decide to transfer, and some intend only to take a course or two for personal reasons. That federal financial aid guidelines require students to have a stated degree objective in order to receive assistance may skew success data, as students have an incentive to report an educational objective even if they have no serious plan to pursue it. (For these reasons, this study applies a particular definition of success, that being the completion of an academic year’s worth of transferable credits, an attainment which represents a clearly delineated and tangible educational value.)

Some analysts have maintained that beginning one’s postsecondary studies in community college reduces the likelihood of completing a four-year degree (Dougherty, 1994; P. Garcia, 2001; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996). However, Bailey and Weininger (2002) found in a large-scale study of CUNY enrollment patterns that immigrants who begin at community colleges do at least show higher academic attainment than native-

born peers in the same programs, and specifically that immigrants who attended U.S. high schools (a cohort which would be predominantly generation 1.5) are more likely to transfer to bachelor's programs than native-born students.

Classroom Behaviors and Academic Strategies

Among the limited research that has focused on the academic efforts of mid-childhood immigrants specifically, a disproportionate amount of attention has been paid to what might be called “coping mechanisms” employed by these students in the effort to succeed academically. These strategies range from the constructive – having a positive attitude and high motivation (Larsen, 2007) – to the inappropriate: Journalist Heller (1997) reported on a perception among faculty and students at one Northeastern college that some immigrants, particularly those from the former Soviet Union, were “more likely than other students to cheat” (p. A37).

Leki (1999) described how generation 1.5 college students can become grade-focused and meticulously meet every demand in a class in order to get an edge and compensate for low achievement in linguistically demanding work, employing strategies such as perfect attendance, class participation, repeated meetings with instructors, and turning in work on time or even early with the aim of impressing the teacher in the hopes that this might counterbalance substandard class work. Leki observed how a student can use “smoke and mirrors to create a public image of [...] a serious, hard-working student” (p. 31); more than focusing on learning the course material, the student becomes fixated on simply passing, and “shrewdness and cleverness” become more important than “academic abilities” (p. 37).

Similarly, Vásquez (2007) offered a detailed longitudinal case study of a generation 1.5 student's college experience, showing that despite her being termed by teachers as very motivated and engaged, neither her enthusiasm nor her strong oral proficiency proved enough to carry her to success in regular college-level coursework; because of her limitations in college-level academic writing skills, Vásquez observed that the student's strong oral/aural proficiency and carefully crafted "good student" persona "were ultimately insufficient to ensure her academic success" at the postsecondary level (p. 345).

College Programs and Academic Support Services

Although research on how academic programs and support services affect immigrant student success at the K-12 levels is extensive (e.g., Baca, Bryan, & McKinney, 1993; Goldenberg, 2008; Jimenez, 1997; Padilla & Gonzalez, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; St-Hilaire, 2002), far less attention has been paid to this question as regards immigrant students at the college level, and in particular as regards mid-childhood immigrants at that level. The literature narrows further when the focus is specifically on these students in community colleges. As revealed throughout the preceding sections of this chapter, rather than considering the effects of specific academic programs, inquiries into the experience of immigrant students at college have focused mainly on such issues as how student characteristics such as ethnicity and prior schooling influence college success (e.g., Bailey & Weininger, 2002) and the significance of motivation and educational goals (Hawley & Harris, 2005), ethnic identity (Senna, 2004), and motivation and social support networks (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997).

Pertaining to community colleges, the question of programs and services which address the needs of increasing numbers of immigrant students—in both the academic and student service areas—has seen growing attention. In a wide-ranging review of literature on the relation between student services and student learning, Williams (2002) identified the increasing diversity of contemporary community college students and consequent “diverse sets of needs brought to campus by these students” as the first among “three broad sets of important challenges professional staff face” (p. 74), while Miele (2003) described one community college’s comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of generation 1.5 students, encompassing both academic and student services in a coordinated program.

English composition, developmental English, and ESL. The needs of the group which has in recent years come to be labeled “generation 1.5” have been publicized and broadly delineated by Harklau (1998), Harklau, Siegal and Losey (1999b), and Roberge (2003); their contributions in this regard are outlined under the heading “The Mid-childhood or ‘generation 1.5’ Immigrant” in this chapter. Beyond describing the group in question, these researchers and others have also identified academic needs particular to the mid-childhood immigrant student in college, and offered recommendations for educational policymakers wishing to better address those needs. As noted previously, it is not surprising that these researchers, like most who have addressed mid-childhood immigrants at college (e.g., Chiang & Schmida, 1999; Crosby, 2007; Harklau, 2003; Harklau, et al., 1999a; Kamhi-Stein, 2003; Larsen, 2007; Leki, 1999; Oudenhoven, 2006; Vásquez, 2007), are primarily concerned with language development and specifically

college writing and reading. Extending from an awareness of the academic characteristics and needs of mid-childhood immigrant students at the college level, the question naturally arises of what, then, might constitute appropriate measures for meeting the needs of those students.

For native speakers who lack certain skills needed for college-level work, extensive preparatory coursework is provided. In fact, “developmental” and “remedial” programs have seen explosive growth in recent decades, which is not to suggest that such programs are a recent phenomenon; by the mid-19th century, many universities had created full preparatory departments to address the needs of underqualified undergraduates (Casazza & Silverman, 1996). Community colleges, in many cases, obtain a major percentage of their enrollments from pre-college level courses; due to their open-enrollment policies, such institutions routinely admit students who lack even rudimentary skills in such areas as mathematics, reading, and/or composition. It is not uncommon for such students to need a year or more of full-time remedial or developmental coursework before crossing the bridge into “regular” college-level courses, a circumstance with significant implications, as this characteristic alone has been seen to predict against success: Hawley and Harris (2005) found a strong correlation between the amount of developmental coursework required and student attrition.

For non-native speakers, English as a Second Language courses are offered; indeed, almost all mid-childhood immigrant students in the U.S. (from non English-speaking countries) are placed at some point into ESL courses in elementary or secondary school. Most community colleges also offer ESL coursework, though these programs are

geared mainly toward newly-arrived immigrants or international students (Roberge, 2003). Most researchers and practitioners have found that the traditional approach to meeting the needs of students of different linguistic backgrounds in writing courses – that is, “normal” courses designed for native speakers and “ESL” courses for newcomers – is ill-suited for mid-childhood immigrants, whose linguistic profiles can differ significantly from both natives and newcomers (Crosby, 2007; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999b; Leki, 1999; Roberge, 2003).

In addition to being arguably inappropriate for mid-childhood immigrant students, ESL courses at college are often quite unpopular among those students, who in many cases were placed into and later “graduated” out of ESL classes during their primary or secondary schooling. The stigma attached to the ESL label is pervasive and powerful among immigrant students with longer residence, many of whom view such placement as tantamount to “special education” status, and strongly resist placement into ESL classes in college (Harklau et al., 1999b). Numerous commentators have offered practical clarification and counsel for writing program designers and instructors working with immigrant students, from broad overview to specific generation 1.5 instructional strategies (e.g., Reid, 1998; Schwartz, 2004; Silva, Leki, & Carson, 1997). Although separate or stand-alone courses designed specifically for generation 1.5 students have been proposed and implemented (Miele, 2003), significant challenges arise in operationalizing such approaches due to the difficulty of identifying such students and distinguishing them from others, since individual student language profiles rarely fall into clearly delineated categories but rather occur along a continuum between “true ESL” and

native-like abilities (Roberge, 2003).

For all of these reasons – the perceived stigma of ESL classes among many mid-childhood immigrants, the unsuitability of traditionally conceived ESL programs for those students, and the near-impossibility of effectively sorting students of varied immigration and linguistic backgrounds – educators in the fields of English composition and second-language acquisition have moved toward models intended to provide more effective instruction by adapting existing classes to include such strategies as building upon students’ oral/aural language skills and integrating these into writing practice (Harklau, et al., 1999b; Roberge, 2003; Schwartz, 2004), providing individualized instruction (Foin & Lange, 2006; Singhal, 2004), and using appropriate methods in the tutoring setting (Thonus, 2003). These approaches presuppose an understanding and appreciation among educators of the issues affecting language learning for a wide range of students, including specifically the complex group called generation 1.5.

Programs supporting student engagement. A highly influential approach to student retention is the integration and learning communities model recommended by Tinto (1975, 1987), which stresses the importance of student engagement for academic success, recognizing the particular challenges educators face in fully integrating culturally and linguistically diverse students into the academic community. Although Tinto’s focus was on four-year institutions, his model has been examined extensively as it might pertain to the community college (Halpin, 1990; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991), with findings that support Tinto’s ideas. Halpin (1990) observed that while educators might have little control over external factors affecting student success, “the creation of

institutional mechanisms to maximize student/faculty contact is likely to result in greater levels of integration and hence persistence” (p. 31). Similarly, Laden (1999) suggested that colleges “promote culturally-sensitive and culturally-specific programs in academic and student services to increase ethnic student motivation and commitment to college” (p. 176).

Garcia (2001) conducted extensive focus group interviews among Hispanic students in California colleges, and found that these students identified as effective programmatic features for increasing academic success such efforts as informed academic advising, academic “jump-start” programs, student orientation programs and classes, developmental coursework, learning support centers. Garcia also found that student engagement in college life and faculty mentoring play a significant role in academic success among Hispanic and immigrant students.

The role of educators. With so much emphasis on the function of student engagement with the college, and the degree to which this connectedness depends on direct connections between students and faculty or staff members, the question arises of what might influence the development of positive connections. Teachers’ and advisers’ awareness of immigrant education issues, as well as their attitudes toward immigrants – encompassing possible ethnocentric perspectives and cultural bias – have been seen to affect the success of immigrants in college (Cooper, Chavira & Mena, 2005; Midobuche, 2001). In recommendations for educators of mid-childhood immigrant students, virtually all researchers who have studied this group have emphasized the importance of educators being aware of generation 1.5 issues, particularly related to language development and

profile (Oudenhoven, 2006; Reid, 1998; Silva, Leki & Carson, 1997; Thonus, 2003).

Cummins (1981) observed how some mid-childhood immigrants' high basic speaking/listening fluency can lead advisers and teachers to inaccurately assume a correspondingly high level of cognitive-academic language proficiency, resulting in inappropriate advising, placements, and instructional strategies.

In a survey of recent findings on variables affecting academic persistence among immigrants and other ethnically diverse students, Cooper, Chavira and Mena (2005) discuss both the positive effects that teachers and counselors can have in helping students succeed as well as the potentially negative effects of educators whose preconceptions about certain groups can cause them to act as "institutional gatekeepers" who direct students away from choices which would most help them succeed in college (p. 421). Midobuche (2001) writes from her experience as an educator in the Southwestern U.S. of a pervasive "anti-immigrant sentiment among teachers" (p. 529), though scant evidence is offered and the real extent of this attitude is unclear.

When considering academic and student services programs in support of immigrant student success, it is important for educational policymakers to bear in mind that much of what ultimately influences students' ability to persist and succeed in college is unrelated to curricula or support services. Garcia (2001) observed that "no one single force is usually the cause of an individual's withdrawal from campus. Instead, the act of early departure may be the result of multiple, interrelated forces [...]. A host of impediments are external to the campus and, therefore, beyond amelioration by campus policies or action" (p. 6).

Epilogue to Chapter Two

Humans are the most adaptive of species; when they find themselves in a new environment, they either revise themselves to better fit the surroundings or alter the environment to suit them – usually some degree of both, a process of adapting to social and physical environments and altering those environments to better suit their purposes. Success in any or all of these spheres is a function of how effectively an individual manages this process. For the immigrant, the newcomer, all of this becomes greatly complicated. Although immigrants often enter into the new and unfamiliar system with a great deal of optimism, they bring with them the “baggage” of whatever system (or systems) they have previously inhabited. Newly inappropriate expectations or behaviors might cause them to misinterpret cues and to be misinterpreted, creating stress and discomfort and sometimes even hazards. As they learn more about the new environment they may come to internalize a self-image as a victim of prejudice and become pessimistic about the future. It is safe to say that at the very least, being a newcomer places innumerable obstacles in the road to success. On the other hand, this newcomer “baggage” can also have a favorable effect on an immigrant’s success within the new system, fostering a consonant sense of identity and grounding, and supporting habits and attitudes valued and useful in the new system.

Mid-childhood immigrants are marked by divided and potentially competing sympathies and allegiances; they can tend toward maintaining a strong identification with the sending culture or toward acculturation to the new, characteristics which can affect their likelihood of succeeding academically. But the inextricable relationships between

ethnicity, language, and culture are complex and engender challenges as much for multilingual/multicultural students as for those who study them; the picture seems a complex mosaic which becomes less distinct the more closely it is studied.

Whether immigrant or home-grown, a student's success in college is influenced by numerous variables: the student's personal characteristics, background, prior schooling, life circumstances, experience of the college environment, degree and perception of ethnic identification, attitude. As educators we expect to exert our control mainly over the latter area, but because this is a closely interconnected system, we benefit from learning as much as we can about how all work, how they interrelate. In doing this, we come closer to knowing how we can maximize student success by doing all within our power to ensure that conditions for success are supported to the greatest degree possible. The following chapter addresses how an inquiry which cast so wide a net was put into action.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND METHODS

Objective reality can never be captured. We know a thing only through its representations. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5)

Opening with such an ostensibly fatalistic statement as the above may seem a strange gambit for a study which presumably seeks to reveal some important truth about the world: If we cannot capture reality, what is the point of conducting research? This is not a rhetorical question; in fact, it is at the very heart of what researchers do. Whether “objective reality” exists, whether it can be captured, or whether we must simply make what we can of its representations – such musings are the starting point of any serious inquiry, the base on which other decisions can be made. In the present inquiry, which depends upon narrative accounts of personal experience, certainly “representations” are of interest; indeed, discovering the meaning inherent in and emerging from the ways that people describe (or represent) their lives is the focus of this study. In this chapter, I will consider questions related to the theoretical and philosophical undergirdings of the study and connect these to the tasks at hand. The first, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) social ecology framework, is included for its value in illustrating and organizing notions key to understanding the complex interrelatedness of social phenomena, and the second, the postmodern perspective, is inescapable and relevant to any qualitative inquiry. These will be followed by discussions of the methodological traditions underlying the study and the practical procedures and protocols employed in conducting the inquiry.

Theoretical Context, Part I: Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecology Framework

The ideas of the developmental psychologist Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) provide an apt conceptual framework for considering the immigrant student's experience.

Bronfenbrenner posits a model for visualizing the interactive systems of influence and manipulation that define the individuals' relationship with their environments as well as their likelihood of successfully developing so as to reach particular goals (e.g., higher education). Bronfenbrenner's framework belongs to what have become known as the "developmental systems" conceptions of human development which suggest that "all the levels of organization involved in human life are linked integratively" (Lerner, 2005, p. xiv). Bronfenbrenner sought to "describe the evolution of cognitive, emotional, and social processes over the life course" (1979, p. 12) by imagining these processes and the factors which determine or affect them as a collection of varyingly overlapping spheres of influence, or "a complex of interconnected, nested systems" (p. 8).

Bronfenbrenner (2001) asserts that "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment" (p. 6). It is important to note that within this construct "symbols" are viewed as encompassing not only those cues which might be subject to cultural variation, but also language itself; that the exposure to certain kinds and uses of language, and by extension to different languages and to different linguistic contexts, which are central to the immigrant student's experience, can significantly affect other areas of development.

The four key parts of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original construct of social ecology are the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem, to which the chronosystem was added in later refinements of the theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). (The term "individual" is used here to denote the participant, or person whose development is of interest to the researcher.)

1. The *microsystem* is the smallest unit in which the individual actively participates, encompassing an immediate physical/material setting and the activities, functions, and interpersonal relationships which exist within and arise from that setting. Examples of microsystems could include the home, the school, the workplace.
2. The *mesosystem* denotes the area of interrelation between two or more microsystems, such as where family becomes involved in (or affects) the individual's school life (and vice versa), or the workplace affects one's social relationships. Different microsystems in an individual's life affect one another.
3. The *ecosystem* denotes a setting in which the individual does not actively participate, but wherein events transpire that have an effect upon (or are affected by) the microsystem and the individual in that microsystem. Examples could include the workplace of a parent or spouse, the school one's friends attend, and so on.
4. The *macrosystem* consists of the social and cultural environment in which the individual exists, including the overriding beliefs and ideologies on which that environment rests. Macrosystem changes can vary greatly in degree; moving from rural Yemen to Amsterdam would be an extreme example, whereas moving from

a large city in Latin America to Miami, or from one region of a given country to another, or even from one neighborhood to another, would be a significant though less acute macrosystem shift. When the macrosystem changes (as in the case of immigration), it has the potential to affect all lower-level systems.

5. The *chronosystem* captures the individual's experience and development across time, encompassing and determined by the ongoing movement of the other systems.

An important proviso of the ecological framework is the notion of bidirectionality, suggesting that just as aspects of environment interact and act upon individuals, so is it possible for individuals to influence the environments they inhabit, and to affect the interactions between those environments. Bidirectionality implies "the individual's power to effect change in each ecological context" (Yakushko & Chronister, 2005).

In a call for researchers in higher education to consider Bronfenbrenner's model when examining student culture, Renn and Arnold (2003) outlined what they viewed as the benefits of this approach:

In inviting contextualized explorations of interactions among and between people and environments, human ecology provides the theoretical underpinning necessary for a wider, more complex view of peer culture. Ultimately, such an approach may be the best way to inform research and practice as we seek to understand and influence the college experience of an increasingly heterogeneous student population. (p. 287)

A strength of the social ecology framework is that it seems to reflect (while systematizing) perspectives on development in complex social contexts which are held by varied qualitative researchers. Without referring to Bronfenbrenner, Tierney (2003)

closely echoed this construct in observing that “the individual is not an autonomous, essentialized agent capable of independently inventing him- or herself. Individual lives are constantly embedded in societal and cultural forces that seek to constrain some and enable others” (p. 299). Similarly, Borland (1990) described the context for narrative inquiry as a “web of expressive social activity” (p. 63).

Bronfenbrenner and Immigration

Not merely applicable to the immigrant experience, Bronfenbrenner’s construct arose therefrom. Bronfenbrenner explained that it was his experience doing research in diverse cultural settings, from Europe to the Middle East to Asia, which

radically expanded my awareness of the resilience, versatility, and promise of the species *Homo sapiens* as evidenced by its capacity to adapt to, tolerate, and especially create the ecologies in which it lives and grows. Seen in different contexts, human nature [...] became plural and pluralistic. (1979, p. xiii)

Qualitative researchers have found the social ecology model useful in examining the interconnected influences and pressures of immigrants and ethnic minorities, including studies focusing on mental health design for recent immigrants (Garcia & Saewyc, 2007), immigrant women’s health (Chronister, McWhirter, & Kerewsky, 2004; Thurston & Vissandjée, 2005; Yakushko & Chronister, 2005), parental involvement in ethnic minority children’s education (Seginer, 2006), as well as immigrant education (Rodby, 1999). Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, & Baartman (2009) studied resilience among Native American students in an inquiry whose analysis was framed entirely within the ecological systems model.

Rodby (1999) applied Bronfenbrenner’s construct in examining the situation of generation 1.5 college students. Building upon Bronfenbrenner’s view that the

development of language skills is particularly susceptible to environmental influences, Rodby affirmed that “all development, but literacy in particular, is enhanced when connections or affiliations exist among the settings where students engage in learning” (p. 48). In a study of mid-childhood immigrant college students and their contexts, Rodby argued that Bronfenbrenner provides an illuminating basis for such exploration and suggested that a greater awareness of this theoretical construct might be gainfully applied in further studies. Rodby posited that the degree of overlap between a college student’s immediate environments (e.g., school, home, work) and the degree to which those overlapping environments reinforce the educational objective are keys to enabling the sort of development which will lead to academic success.

As an indication of how aptly Bronfenbrenner’s model captures the sense of the immigrant experience, researchers on immigrant issues affirm his construct even in seeming unawareness of his work. In reference to generation 1.5 learners, Harklau, Losey and Siegal (1999b) apply Bronfenbrenneresque language, saying that their college experience “must often be understood within the context of social webs that surround each student” (p. 5). Bronfenbrenner’s concept of the *chronosystem* (which concerns how earlier life experience affects later development) is reflected in the phenomenon Suárez-Orozco (1989) termed the “dual frame of reference,” where adult immigrant experience of the present setting is influenced by recollection of the country of origin. Another chronosystem-like concept from migration studies is that of *incorporation* (Bean & Stevens, 2003), an omnibus term encompassing processes transpiring across time such as immigrant adaptation, acculturation, assimilation, and accommodation. Incorporation

thus defined readily evokes Bronfenbrenner's notion of bidirectionality: Citing earlier work by Alba and Nee (2003), Bean and Stevens (2003) describe how "newcomers affect their host societies even as those societies are affecting the newcomers" (p. 94).

Bronfenbrenner's Principles for Qualitative Research

Having found his conceptual framework useful in visualizing the interactive influences of the immigrant experience, I am attentive to the principles Bronfenbrenner (1979) posited to guide research in such questions: (a) consideration of the whole environment rather than focusing a study on only school or a lab setting³; (b) awareness of the "plasticity" of individual life courses, the possibility for change which arises from the interaction of individuals with their environments, an engagement between two active, multifaceted, and mutually influential and influenceable forces; (c) conceiving of an individual's environment not as static but as "evolving processes of interaction" (p. 17); (d) awareness that the researcher's main purpose is "not hypothesis testing but *discovery*" (p. 37, emphasis his); and (e) use of non-manipulative research methods, mindful of ethical problems which arise when a researcher might control variables which can affect an individual's development.

Theoretical Context, Part II: Postmodernism

Though Denzin and Lincoln (2005) declare that qualitative research "has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own" (p. 6), an informed discussion of diverse

³ Qualitative research methodologists Lincoln and Guba (1985) reference Bronfenbrenner's perspective on this topic in their admonition that findings taken from laboratory studies are likely to be "applicable only in other laboratories" (p. 297).

populations in present-day U.S. higher education inescapably takes place in an intellectual environment marked by modes of perception and expression that have come to be collected under the heading of postmodernism⁴. A hallmark of postmodern educational theory is its strenuous argument in defense of pluralism and multiculturalism. The prominent postmodern educationalist Henry Giroux (1997) posits learning as an endeavor in which each individual “must engage knowledge as a border-crosser” and suggests a primary function of any institution of learning is to “engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages” (p. 147). Giroux (1991) chooses the border metaphor to “signal a recognition of those epistemological, political, cultural and social margins that structure the language of history, power and difference” (p. 28). This image conjures not only metaphoric but literal meaning for those seeking insight into bilingual and bicultural mid-childhood immigrants.

A scholar whose extensive work in issues related to generation 1.5 learners has been cited throughout this study, Harklau (1998, 2003) is one of many observers of higher education who engage a postmodernist and multicultural perspective. Harklau (1998) argued that the education process wields “a diffuse but nonetheless powerful influence over how individuals are to think about themselves” (p. 642) and that educators should be aware that in many cases the modes of thinking required at college “violate the

⁴ This term is associated with and often conflated with post structuralism and post positivism, and sometimes with post colonialism. Tierney (2003) notes “a great deal of confusion between postmodernism and post structuralism and various kinds of postmodernism” (p. 294). All arose largely in response to the modernist embrace of scientific empiricism, which emphasizes experimental and quantitative research methods.

basic cultural norms and assumptions of students raised and socialized in other cultures” (p. 643).

Giroux, Harklau, and other researchers and theorists exhibiting postmodernist tendencies in their explorations of educational diversity (e.g., Borland, 1990; Gonzalez et al., 2003; Matsuda et al., 2003; Ogbu, 1978; Portes & Bach, 1985; Preto-Bay, 2004; Rumbaut, 1995) owe a large debt to the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire. Freire, whose slim *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) was one of the more resounding shots across the bow of educational modernism, was primarily interested in public education as a means to fundamental social change, and he viewed as the most important goal of education the understanding of how the uneducated and underprivileged are victims of societal oppression. Freire carried this view into the classroom itself, and characterized the teacher-pupil relationship as one of authoritarian oppression, referring to this as “the student-teacher contradiction” (p. 46).

As will be evident in the ensuing discussion of methods, the postmodernist world-view – its defense of pluralism and its concern with the ways that culture and language influence or determine power relationships (and the logical extension thereof in which changes in cultural and linguistic variables can result in changes in said power relationships) – are prominent and even foundational in the works of various authorities in the field of qualitative research (Beverley, 2004; Chase, 1995, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Geertz, 1973). Any qualitative researcher, whether he or she embraces a postmodernist stance or not, must be aware of the concerns of postmodernism, their formative influence on the development of qualitative methods, and their particular

applicability to discussions of diversity and inclusion.

Qualitative Methodology

As the review of literature of this study makes clear, the topic in question is one marked by complexity: What enables students to succeed? What is unique about the experience of mid-childhood immigrants and their development toward college success? From their own perspective, what influences their likelihood of succeeding or not – what gives them an edge, what pushes them over it? A range of possibilities has been posited as significant or determinative, from family and mentors to specialized curriculum, from linguistic profile and prior schooling to socioeconomic status, from ethnic self-identification to acculturation. What is clear is that none of these variables function in isolation, that the processes of development, the environments of development, and the conditions under which development occurs, operate interactively and bidirectionally. The question involves human relationships, emotions, attitudes, perceptions. It is natural, then, that the method sought to investigate such questions be an expansive one, one which allows a wide net to be cast, one which embraces complexity.

Although at this point the researcher hopes it may safely be assumed that a general defense of qualitative inquiry design is unnecessary, the question must be addressed as to why this method is best for a given study. Maxwell (1996) posits “five particular research purposes for which qualitative studies are particularly suited” (p. 17), those being

Understanding the *meaning*, for participants of the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved in and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences [...]. Understanding the particular *context* within which the

participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions [...]. Identifying *unanticipated* phenomena and influences [...]. Understanding the *process* by which events and actions take place [...]. Developing *causal* explanations. (pp. 17-18)

Similarly, Glesne (1999) posits that “qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes” (p. 24). Maxwell’s and Glesne’s overviews are in line with that of other qualitativists (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Mason, 1996), and capture the essence of the present inquiry: It is one which seeks insight into how the participants have perceived their experiences of academic development, what role their environments or contexts have played in this, and how the process of development has occurred. Though it begins with a review of what has previously been found in relevant studies, this inquiry uses an open-ended design to permit “unanticipated” data to surface.

Unlike quantitativists, who “tend to be interested in whether and to what extent variance in x causes variance in y ” those working from a qualitative perspective “tend to ask *how* x plays a role in causing y , what the process is that connects x and y ” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 20). Qualitative researchers seek to describe the complexity of a phenomenon rather than reduce it to an “objectively verifiable” set of numbers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This approach seeks no less than to yield “an interpretation of reality that is useful in understanding the human condition” (p. 25). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the capacity of qualitative research to embrace and to strive to characterize the complex interrelationships between participants and their environments, between others in those environments, between participants and researchers, and between past and present; qualitative researchers, they say, are most concerned with “the socially constructed nature

of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p. 10). Tierney (2003) makes a similar claim, but more succinctly: “The qualitative researcher refuses to be limited” (p. 49).

The nature of the qualitative approach is arguably paradoxical in the sense that not only does it allow the broadest possible net to be cast in an inquiry, but also it makes possible the study of fine-grained detail as well. A concept key to the qualitative approach is what Geertz (1973) termed “thick description,” a multi-layered portrayal of the phenomenon or process which includes both the more obvious superficial aspects and also less apparent but significant undercurrents, contextual influences, telling details.

The Researcher and the Approach

In selecting a particular research method, a central determinant is the researcher her- or himself: What method best fits his or her background, world view, temperament? Bogdan and Biklen (1998) observed that “people tend to adhere to the methodology that is most consonant with their socialized worldview” (p. 8). As a researcher, my sense of the world is what directs my choice of method, and I view the world as a place most tellingly described in processes and relationships, as a place where people literally see things differently and apply meanings to the things they see in idiosyncratic ways, as a place where the unexpected happens as often as not, and as a place where change is a reliable constant. My background includes a degree and teaching experience in literature as well as professional work writing and publishing both fiction and nonfiction (e.g., journalistic reporting and essays). In literature studies and literary analysis, as well as in journalism and other forms of nonfiction writing, one practices the habit of seeking the

“stratified hierarchy of meaning structures” (Geertz, 1973; in Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 28) in events and texts. This practice is typically more structured, codified and deliberate when applied to the interpretation of narrative research data, but its essence remains the same. The choices that research participants make in telling their stories – emphasis, images, patterns, chronology – all contribute to the making of meaning. Like a journalist, the researcher’s goal is to record “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of nuanced and telling detail, while keeping an eye on how such detail contributes to constructing a larger meaning in “a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5).

Over many years as a reader and writer and as a teacher of reading and writing, I have become convinced that people view (and filter) the world through narratives, to some degree of their own design but often imposed from elsewhere; this certainty has been strongly reinforced by my reading of the qualitative research authorities cited herein. I have of course encountered qualitative studies which I felt were soft-headed or sparsely illuminating, but just as often I have seen traditionally “scientific” or “empirical” studies severely constrained by the need to reduce the complexity of human experience to a small handful of quantifiable variables. This is to say, both approaches are subject to undisciplined or inappropriate application. My choice of the qualitative presupposes my capacity to conduct the inquiry in a reasonable and reliable manner. The remainder of this chapter constitutes my argument that such is the case.

The Design of the Study

In what has been described as an early “classic qualitative study” (Maxwell, 1996,

p. 3), the researchers reported that their inquiry “had no design. That is, no well-worked-out set of hypotheses to be tested, no data-gathering instruments purposely designed to secure information relevant to these hypotheses, no set of analytic procedures specified in advance,” and that instead, the study was guided by the researchers’ “original view of the problem, [their] theoretical and methodological commitments, and the way these affected [their] research and were affected by it as [they] proceeded” (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961/1977, seen in Maxwell, 1996, p. 3). Inasmuch as possible, the present study was conducted in a similar spirit. Although significant particulars were identified as specifically as possible in advance (e.g., the focus of the study and research questions, data-gathering and analysis methods, as well as an understanding of the contexts of the problem and relevant scholarship), I believed it essential at the same time to approach the study with an open mind, which is to say without a preconceived notion of what my findings were likely to indicate. The literature review in the previous chapter employed a “big tent” approach expressly to allow for the widest possible range of consideration of what the collected data might portend.

Nor did the inquiry seek to validate or invalidate any particular pre-existing hypothesis or theoretical stance; as Bronfenbrenner (1979) urged, the researcher’s main purpose is “not hypothesis testing but *discovery*” (p. 37). Even my employment of Bronfenbrenner is subject to this caveat: Though I introduce the social ecology construct as a potentially useful framework for considering the phenomena attendant to mid-childhood immigrant education, this study was not set up as a referendum on Bronfenbrenner or any other theory mentioned herein. Its aim was simple: discovery.

Narrative Research Methods

The role of narrative as a mode of thinking by which humans organize and derive meaning from experience is broadly acknowledged, though narrative researchers characterize the essence of this mode in distinct ways. Life story researcher Robert Atkinson (2001) viewed narrative in visceral terms, as “basic to our nature” and “in our blood” (§ 1, 4). Geertz (1995) described narrative’s role in defining experience in similarly direct terms: “Whatever it is, besides existent, our sense of it...comes inevitably out of the way we talk about it” (p. 18, cited in Glesne, 1999, p. 177). Bell (2002) adopted a more coolly academic tone, explaining that “narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures” (p. 207). Bell explained how education research – and especially that concerned with immigrants and language learners – could benefit from employing a narrative approach: “A key way of coming to understand the assumptions held by learners from other cultures is to examine their stories and become aware of the underlying assumptions that they embody” (p. 207).

Although narrative inquiry has long been the near-exclusive domain of social scientists with a qualitative inclination, the essentiality of narrative in ordering human thought processes has been observed by historians and philosophers (e.g., Bowersock, 1994; Ong, 1982) and demonstrated by psychological and neuroscience inquiry (e.g., McAdams, 2008; Runyan, 1982). Reflecting on recent research into how the brain organizes and processes information, neuropsychology researcher McAdams observed that “narratives guide behavior in every moment, and frame not only how we see the past

but how we see ourselves in the future” (Carey, 2007, ¶ 5).

The Life Story Approach

A sub-genre of narrative research methodologies, life story comprises an open-ended yet rigorously comprehensive approach which values above all individuals’ own choices regarding how to present and shape the telling of their experiences. Atkinson (2001) described the life story approach to research as having “evolved from the oral history, life history, and other ethnographic and field approaches” (¶ 10). This approach requires recognition of the significance of the ways humans create narrative structures which reveal how we perceive ourselves and derive meaning from our experiences. Life story also makes a distinction from approaches which purport to reveal “history,” since the latter concept is one which requires the researcher to engage in far more than interviewing participants; to reliably ascertain if events have historical veracity requires further triangulation, verification, documentation, and so on. Titon (1980) defined the difference between “life history” and “life story” in simple terms: “A story is made, but history is found out” (p. 278). The researcher assembling life histories is far more directive, Titon averred, for “he asks the questions, sorts through the accounts [...] and edits his way toward a coherent whole” (p. 283), and as such “it is no wonder that the typical life history strips the individual of his voice” (p. 284).

Life story research, in contrast, is concerned not with the question of what may or may not have actually happened to a participant (i.e., his or her “history”), but with the equally pertinent question of how participants *perceive* what happened and, most significantly, how they *choose to recount* those stories to others. This recounting, this

narrative, does not represent a journalistic or historical reportage; rather, it reveals how the individuals choose to make sense of their experiences, and how they choose to manifest them to others. Comparing it to life *history*, Tilton (1980) defined life *story* as “an expression of personality and self-conception – the who and why rather than just the what and how” of a life (p. 290).

Immigrants, in particular, imbue their narratives with thick description of the cultural and social components of individual identity (Baynham & De Fina, 2005; De Fina, 2003). Applying a perspective reminiscent of Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) chronosystem, Atkinson (2001) characterized the life story approach as especially suited to exploring “how cultural values and traditions influenced development across the life cycle” (§ 17); he believes our stories “foster an unfolding of the self,” and how this in turn can “bring order to our experience” and facilitate “forming an identity” (§ 6). A feature of the life story which immigrants may find especially important is its power to place us in a larger context: In telling our stories, “ageless themes and motifs emerge that link us to our ancestors” (Atkinson, 2001, § 6).

Rationale for the Selection of the Life Story Approach

The life story method entails approaching research participants not as sources of data for a given set of predetermined questions (which serve to impose boundaries on possible responses), but as people with lived experiences and stories to tell about them, with a volume of unwritten narrative in their heads, the form of which can hardly be guessed at beforehand. For the present study, this approach is more appropriate than more structured alternatives. Narrative research, and in particular the life story approach, holds

that the story itself is the data: how individuals tell their stories, what they include and what they leave out – “the who and why rather than just the what and how” of their lives (Titon, 1980, p. 290).

As mentioned previously, another reason I found this method to be appropriate is that it provided a close match with me as a researcher. Though this study marked the first major qualitative inquiry I had undertaken, as a student and teacher of literature I have had considerable background in the work of interpreting narratives, of close reading of written accounts to reveal the themes and patterns and relationships and meanings that those texts contain. A fundamental correlation exists between discovering meaning in literary texts and discovering meaning in other, less obviously deliberate, artful, or “literary” texts – such as the stories one hears every day (if one is paying attention) from the people one meets in various settings, people whose situations and experiences are quite often immensely rich and varied. The accounts gathered via the interviews in the present study represent such texts, referred to throughout the findings as “interview data.” As in literary analysis, all claims are derived exclusively from this textual data and the analysis and interpretation thereof.

Research for Political Action: Testimonio

Given that this study focused on Latino immigrants, one obvious approach to employ might be the “testimonio,” which has been held up as an implicit model for any narrative or life story research interpreted in terms of subalternity and oppression (Beverley, 1991). *Testimonio* has been applied explicitly as a research method to guide inquiries into the experiences of immigrant Latino college students (Benmayor, 1991,

2002; Gonzalez, Plata, Garcia, Torres, & Urrieta, 2003). As the name suggests, the *testimonio* is commonly associated with the experience of Latino and Latin American participants, and in particular with those seen as oppressed or marginalized (Beverley 1991, 2004; Gugelberger & Kearney, 1991; Warren, 1998), and utilized in numerous texts dealing with such themes (e.g., Behar, 1993; Dalton, 1972; Menchú & Burgos-Debray, 1984).

The underlying premise of *testimonio* is self-evident: As in a legal proceeding, the role of the participant (witness/victim) is to offer “testimony” about the offense. The nature of *testimonio* is that it reveals injustice, and as such has an unavoidable political component; the ethical listener or reader is, as Beverley says, “under an obligation to respond” (2004, p. 1). This places *testimonio* squarely within the postmodern or postcolonial frame, wherein both researcher and participant are seen as potential political actors; Fontana and Frey (2005) characterize this perspective in a discussion of interviewing methodology: “If the interview cannot be a neutral tool (and we will see that it never really was), why not turn it into a walking stick to help some people get on their feet?” (p. 695).

But to characterize an inquiry at the outset as *testimonio* (and the interview as a “walking stick”) is to presuppose that an injustice or injury has taken (or is taking) place. To frame an inquiry as *testimonio*, to express it thus to participants, is to ask them to limit and shape their narratives in ways that serve a pre-determined argument (or at least a predefined worldview): that of revealing the oppression or marginalization of the subaltern (a label placed on the participant *a priori* by the researcher). Even if the

political perspective is not made explicit to the participant but simply taken as a given by the researcher/interviewer, it necessarily limits the realm of what the researcher considers possible; it pre-interprets the data.

For research which truly seeks the unknown, which is driven by discovery, the place for a perspective of this sort is not as a point of departure, but rather at the stage of data analysis and interpretation, and this only if in fact their accounts indicate that participants – of their own accord – move toward describing their experiences in ways that reveal perceptions of subalternity, discrimination, oppression, and so on, or as part of a marginalized or oppressed community. Even writing from a decidedly political position, feminist life-story researcher Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) stipulates that “conscious-raising, if attempted, must take place *after* the analysis” [emphasis added] and that “it would be illusory and ethically questionable to use the narrative as a means to transform the conceptions held by the interviewed” (p. 89). Hence, while mindful of the aims of *testimonio* and related methods, as well as relevant research gathered in this way (e.g., Benmayor, 1991, 2002; González et al., 2003), I believe that framing my research in such terms at the outset would be tantamount to beginning with a specific preconception of findings, an inappropriate and inadvisable strategy.

Individual Perspective and the Oral Tradition

Qualitativists have long voiced concerns about the effects of “sociological questions” (Borland, 1990) which lead interviewees into particular sorts of answers, as well as the tell-them-what-they-want-to-hear phenomenon where the participant is influenced by some aspect of the interviewer or the relationship established between

interviewer and participant. Any attentive teacher has observed that certain students, for example, are quite adept at conforming their output to what they perceive to be the instructor's preferences.

A related phenomenon has been described wherein members of a community marked by oral tradition can tend to speak not for themselves as individuals but rather as *de facto* spokespersons for a group; they express what they perceive to be the position of their peer cohort. Cultural historian Walter Ong (1991) described the role of the speaker in cultures with strong oral narrative traditions, who “effects, not a transfer of his own intentions, but a conventional realization of traditional thought for his listeners” (p. 145). Atkinson (1998) reveals his awareness of this tendency, and the potential value of it, when he writes of the life story's power to connect speakers not only to their community but their ancestors, their community's history. Others have discussed this effect not in terms of its potential for distorting the reporting of individual experience but of its strength in presenting an action-oriented political message (Beverley, 1995; González, et al., 2003); personal data framed by participants this way have been described under the designation “community in the text” (Benmayor, 1991, p. 167). For the researcher conducting interviews in which this tendency may manifest, the prescription might be first an awareness of the possibility that a participant may be speaking from a collectivist perspective; then, if it seems such, and if an accounting of the participant's own individual experience is truly what is sought, then the interviewer might attempt to elicit data which refer to concrete occurrences and thoughts or feelings which are specific to the participant. However, the observation that a participant tends toward adopting a

community orientation or “spokesperson” positioning in an account may be illuminating in itself, raising questions of why they choose this orientation and what message they are thus advocating.

Description of the Research Design

Site Selection and Access

The cliché “all politics are local politics” resonates in qualitative research as well: Flick (2002) observed that “knowledge and practice are studied as local knowledge and practice” (seen in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 11). The study was conducted at a two-year college in which I have been employed for six years. As detailed in Chapter One, the college serves a large and growing Latino immigrant gateway community and as such is arguably representative of the kind of institution in which a large number, if not a majority, of Latino newcomers in the United States first encounter higher education. Over the past two decades of massively increased immigration, the two-year college, with generally open-access admissions and a strong emphasis on developmental language support, has clearly come to represent a valuable entry point into higher education for Hispanics as well as for other minority and non-native English-speaking students (Hu & St. John, 2001; Outcalt, Tobolowsky, & McDonough, 2000).

Though “backyard” studies such as this have become increasingly common in the current educational research environment wherein institutions seem ever more wary of permitting access to outside researchers, and though a backyard site affords certain advantages (as described in the previous paragraph), this choice presents particular issues which much also be addressed, such as the need to strive to avoid “preformed

assumptions about what is going on” (Glesne, 1999, p. 25), as well as the need to be mindful of and strive to overcome possible effects of an apparent power imbalance inherent in any teacher/student interaction. These issues are discussed more fully in the following section.

Size of the Population

Quantifying the population of mid-childhood Latino immigrants currently studying in the first year of college in the United States is a truly speculative endeavor, though given that known immigration from Latin America during the past decade is in the many millions (see “Immigrants in U.S. Higher Education” in Chapter One for specifics), this number is surely substantial. The college in which the study took place had at the time a student headcount in transfer classes of roughly 5,000, and of these some 80% were Latinos, for a total of roughly 4,000 Latino students. To reliably establish the number of immigrants in the student body of Gateway Community College was impossible since the college does not report the place of birth of students⁵; thus it was impossible also to precisely determine the number of mid-childhood immigrants at the college. However, if even a fifth of the Latinos were foreign-born (this seems a conservative estimate), the total immigrants would equal some 800 students. Among these, if the average age was 20, and if their ages on arrival were roughly evenly distributed, then those who arrived between 8 and 16 (a nine-year range, spanning 45% of the 20-year age average) would represent just under half the 800 immigrant students –

⁵ In this regard it is like most other institutions of higher education: neither government entities nor postsecondary institutions uniformly gather or share data on students’ country of birth or immigration status (Macias, 2000, p. 43).

perhaps 350 students out of 5,000. This, as stated above, is highly speculative; the actual number is indiscernible in practical terms. In practice, assigning a numerical value to the population was not a datum relevant to the aims of the study, and in any case finding a suitable number of qualified participants for the study did not ultimately present a significant problem.

Sampling Techniques

Parameters of the population. Study data was collected via extended interviews with a sample consisting of individuals who affirmed themselves to meet the following criteria:

1. They were Latino (i.e., originated from Spanish-speaking Latin America).
2. They immigrated to the U.S. from Latin America between the ages of 8 and 16 (see “Language, Literacy, and Academic Development” in Chapter Two for a discussion of the significance of age on arrival).
3. They completed or left secondary school in the U.S. within roughly 5 years prior to the initial interview (in order to mitigate variation due to length of residence).
4. They had completed a minimum of one semester (15 credit hours) of transferable college-level coursework.

Gateway Community College served as a point of contact and the site of all interviews. The descriptors above represent an attempt to identify subjects who were representative of the mid-childhood immigrant experience among Latinos in the United States, as discussed in Chapter Two. The participants in this study, mid-childhood Latino immigrant students at Gateway Community College, can be viewed as substantially

representative of similarly defined populations at other urban community colleges in the United States, and as such whatever lessons can be learned from them regarding their efforts to succeed and make progress in higher education may arguably shed light upon the circumstances of their peers elsewhere.

Purposeful sampling. Individuals interviewed in this study were identified according to their matching rather closely specified characteristics, a technique known as purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) or “criterion-based selection” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This approach was taken for reasons related to the study design and toward the goal of maximizing the potential usefulness of findings. As the study involved open-ended interviews conducted by a single researcher, the potential number of participants was for practical reasons limited (the number of participants is discussed in more detail later in this section) and the inquiry was focused on a single site of access, circumstances for which narrowly defined purposeful sampling is preferred (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990; Maxwell, 1996). In addition, purposeful sampling has been seen to enhance transferability in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The objectives of purposeful or criterion-based sampling include ensuring the representativeness of the sample, or how well it reflects the characteristics of the larger population of like individuals, as well as heterogeneity, or how well the sample succeeds in “defining the dimensions” of the population (Maxwell, 1996, p. 71). Glesne (1999) points out that the intent of using a “homogeneous sampling” of similar cases is to enable collection of data with enough depth and richness to support meaningful analysis (p. 29). Patton (1990) describes the effective purposeful sample as comprised of “information-

rich cases...from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169).

In the interest of ensuring appropriate heterogeneity of the sample to the degree possible, a wide range of experience and salient characteristics from within known parameters (e.g., age on arrival, length of residence, degree of transnationality) was sought, while participants whose background or experiences seem clearly atypical and unrepresentative of what is considered the normal range of diversity of Latino mid-childhood immigrants were not included in the study.

Study of underrepresented and hidden populations. This study focused on individuals who were members of a population which is by its definition difficult to identify and access. Though the term “hidden population” is generally taken to refer to individuals whose behaviors might be viewed (by themselves and others) as sensitive, illegal, or shameful (such as drug users or compulsive gamblers), a group can also be termed a hidden population when they simply “are difficult to distinguish from members of the general population (for example, jazz musicians)” (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004, p. 195). This is clearly the case with mid-childhood Latino immigrants in an academic setting with a large majority Latino enrollment of whom a substantial percentage are foreign-born. Studying less visible populations can also create challenges in determining the representativeness of the sample, as “it is difficult to assess who has been excluded when the group under investigation is ‘hidden’” (Browne, 2005, p. 6). In retrospect, minimal difficulty was encountered in identifying participants despite their “hidden” status; for reasons discussed in the findings (e.g., pleased surprise to discover interest in

them as a defined group, the desire to publicize their situation), a viable sampling of qualified participants volunteered readily.

Number of participants. The target number participants for in-depth interviewing was stated as between 12 and 15; in the end, 15 participants were interviewed. Seidman (2006) sums up the dilemma of determining an appropriate number of participants in a given study: “‘Enough’ is an interactive reflection of every step of the interview process and different for each study and each researcher” (p. 55). The most commonly held rule of thumb is to seek new data until nothing previously undiscovered – no new themes, no new patterns, no new perspectives, in short, no new useful information – seem to be emerging from the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995), a point referred to as “saturation of information” (Seidman, 2006, p. 55). This condition was found to obtain within the final study sample.

Identifying and contacting participants. In this study, participants were recruited via two techniques: (a) *in-person recruitment*, wherein the researcher visited a number of English composition classes during the Spring semester of 2009 for the purposes of distributing and reading aloud an announcement including an explanation of the study, participant criteria, and researcher contact information (see “Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Notice” for the text of such announcements), asking potential participants to contact him directly, and responding to any questions which arose; (b) *self-identification* wherein potential participants who received the information about the study via in-person recruitment then contacted the researcher to volunteer; and (b) *chain-referral* or *snowball* method (Coleman, 1958), in which informational material (with text identical to

that in Appendix B) was passed from individuals who received it from the researcher to peers of their acquaintance who met the criteria.

Regarding these procedures, in the interest of ensuring that all individuals were treated with respect and that privacy was protected, the following practices also obtained: In no instance were participants or others asked to provide contact information on potential additional participants to the researcher. In the case of (a) above, in-person recruitment, particular care was taken to avoid the possibility of identifying or pressuring individuals to participate. In the classroom setting, individual students were neither identified by the researcher or the instructor as potentially meeting the criteria, nor were they requested to identify themselves at that time. Instructors were asked to leave the room during the researcher's presentation. All students in the groups received the informative handout and were asked to contact the researcher if they wish to participate. In a few cases, students either left the announcements on their desks or handed them back to the researcher at the end of the presentation.

The three contact approaches outlined above were intended to identify and access a viable and purposeful sample by implementing differing methods in order to minimize sampling concerns inherent in using a single approach.

In the research proposal, plans were specified for handling the possibility that more qualified volunteers would come forward than the study required, to wit: that participants would be selected based on the principles of (a) heterogeneity (Maxwell, 1996), spanning the breadth of the potential characteristics within the stated criteria (i.e., a variety of Latin American countries of origin, as well as a range of ages on arrival,

years since leaving high school, and total transferable college credit hours completed) and (b) random selection of candidates in the case that more than the necessary number are available once the principle of heterogeneity is satisfied, in order “to avoid the perception of favoritism in selecting interviewees” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 71). Those individuals who volunteered but who were not included in interviewing were to be contacted by the researcher and informed of the circumstances of their non-inclusion (see “Appendix C: Notice to Volunteer of Initial Non-inclusion in Study”). However, in the end, this was not necessary, as the total number of qualified participants who came forward met the needs of heterogeneity and met but did not exceed a desirable sample size. (A handful of volunteers were disqualified simply because they did not meet the criteria of the study.)

Snowball or chain-referral sampling. Potential issues arising from the use of snowball or chain-referral have been widely debated (Browne, 2005; Eland-Goossensen, Van de Goor, VoUemans, Hendricks, & Garetsen, 1997; Geddes, 1990; Lopes, Rodrigues, & Sichieri, 1996; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004; Wong, 2008). The most obvious limitation of this technique is that “individuals who are excluded from social networks for any reason will almost certainly be absent from research accounts that employ these social networks” (Browne, 2005, p. 6). This sampling technique is nonetheless common and viewed as appropriate by most qualitativists (Coleman, 1958; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996), and even to some degree inevitable in circumstances such as those described here, given that “underrepresented, excluded, and hidden populations are by their classification inaccessible” (Wong, 2008,

p. 6).

Advantages have also been observed in the use of snowball sampling, especially in cases of less visible populations wherein participants who don't know the researcher report feeling more at ease during the interview if contact was made through friends or acquaintances (Browne, 2005). Wong (2008) suggests that this technique offers the additional benefit that "interviewees are often more forthcoming because of the familiarity researchers have with their social networks" (Wong, 2008, p. 4).

Roughly one third of the participants in this study were identified via chain referral. It seemed that in some cases referral by a participant who had already been interviewed played a key role in persuading other potential participants that the study was worthwhile and that the researcher was trustworthy. Referral may have taken particular significance in cases in which the participants lacked legal immigration status and as such might otherwise have been reluctant to speak openly with an interlocutor unknown to them. It also may have helped to mitigate a preference (as described by a few participants) of some Latino students to avoid interaction with non-Latinos for reasons related to language (i.e., lack of confidence in English) or ethnicity.

Snowball sampling, smaller-n studies, and transferability. Though self-identification and snowball sampling lack randomness in participant selection and as such raise concerns for transferability claims about a study, some researchers have offered vigorous arguments that a sample based on chain referral within social networks can be demonstrated to be unbiased and effectively representative (Lopes, Rodrigues, & Sichieri, 1996; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). Wong (2008) posits that the trade-off in

transferability which occurs in smaller- n studies employing purposive and snowball sampling is unavoidable and justified by its necessity to reach less-visible groups: “While increasing the n of randomly sampled units arguably enhances the validity of inferences one derives from population samples, it is inadequate for capturing the processes that cause the under-representation or exclusion of hidden populations” (p. 2).

Finally, it must be recognized that the techniques employed in this study – in-person recruitment, self-identification, and snowballing – are incapable of ensuring a random sampling. For example, self-identifiers who respond to announcements are by dint of this behavior arguably more extroverted or show more ambition than their peers who do not volunteer, and participants chain-referred by peers are not randomly selected. However, the sample of participants who were interviewed for this study did meet stated the criteria and reflected the objectives of representativeness and heterogeneity.

Data Collection Approach: Open-ended Interviewing on a Focused Topic

Borland (1990) observed that in research using interview or dialogue generated data, “personal narratives occur naturally in a conversational context” (p. 63). In employing a life story interviewing approach, Atkinson (2001) and Titon (1980) generally reject the notion that the researcher should impose a particular direction or focus on the interviewing process⁶. Choices about the data, they believe, should be made by the speaker. On the other hand, it should be noted that these researchers were primarily concerned with eliciting life stories from single participants who were

⁶ This expansive scope is also seen in the “life course” research approach (e.g., Clausen, 1988; Cohler, 1982; Courgeau, 1990).

predetermined to have something interesting to say; these were typically musicians or individuals known to be repositories of folk knowledge, in short, natural and practiced storytellers.

Others (e.g., Chase, 1995; Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994) see it as permissible or even advisable for a researcher to “prestructure” even an open-ended inquiry, limiting its scope to focus on specific areas of interest. Chase (2005) posits a definition of life story as possibly focusing on “a particular event [or] a significant aspect of one’s life such as schooling, work, marriage, divorce” and so on (p. 652). For most qualitative studies, Maxwell (1996) argues, “prestructuring reduces the data that you have to deal with [and] simplifies the analytic work involved” (p. 64). Indeed, Miles and Huberman (1994) caution that “if you’re new to qualitative studies and are looking at a better understood phenomenon within a familiar culture or subculture, a loose, inductive design is a waste of time” (p. 17).

Did the focus of this inquiry qualify as a “better understood phenomenon”? As can be seen from the literature review in the preceding chapter, the phenomenon of student success and all the possible variables which can influence it has been widely researched, though equally apparent is the lack of general consensus on the dynamics of this process; nonetheless, the phenomenon certainly has been broadly addressed. Was the population “familiar”? Although mid-childhood immigrants have only recently been identified as a distinct group or “subculture” and studied as such, they exist on a continuum between two familiar cultures, those of the native-born and the first-generation immigrant, thus arguably meeting the last of Miles and Huberman’s

conditions. Also, after more than two decades of working with immigrant students, including large numbers of mid-childhood arrivers, I could not describe the characteristics of this population as “unfamiliar” to me as a researcher.

Interview Protocol and Procedures

With the issues raised in the preceding subsection in mind, the present inquiry utilized an interview protocol designed to encourage participants to speak expansively, to tell the stories of their life experiences with “thick detail,” while at the same time encouraging them to focus on those specific aspects of the larger experience that they believed had affected their ability to make academic progress.

Mindful that “an interviewer assumes more direct control over the construction of data than does a researcher using most other methods” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 676), the interviews for this study were conducted in the spirit of the life story approach described in Titon (1980) and Atkinson (1998, 2001) (and discussed more fully in this chapter under the heading “The Life Story Approach”), an approach in whose most extreme manifestation the ideal is full interviewee control over interview content.

Nonetheless, in the interest of obtaining information specifically relevant to the study within reasonable timeframes, an interview protocol and guide were employed (see “Appendix D: Interview Protocol and Guide”). This guide was designed organized around the topics found by other researchers and commentators to be likely factors in influencing the academic success of immigrant students, topics which have been covered in Chapter Two and which are delineated in outline form under the subheading “Foreshadowed Questions” later in this section.

Further justifications for employing this guide are “to minimize interviewer effects” by supporting consistency in the execution of interviews, as well as to ensure that “the interview is carefully focused so that interviewee time is carefully used” (Patton, 1990, p. 285). The interview guide was not used as a script but rather to offer concrete guidance to the interviewer while permitting maximum potential for responses from the participant. As stated above, the interview process was handled inasmuch as possible in accordance with life story principles.

Principles for using the interview guide. Most authorities agree with Seidman’s (2006) assertion that “interview guides can be useful, but must be used with caution” (p. 92). Marshal and Rossman (2006) describe how in an effective interview “the researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participants’ views, but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses,” in accord with a fundamental assumption of qualitative inquiry: “The participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it” (p. 101).

Regarding the format of the interview guide, Atkinson (1998) describes this as a “short list of [...] carefully selected broad, open-ended questions that you can augment with generic-type probe questions or comments to get at more details on any given topic, such as ‘What was that experience like for you?’ ‘What happened next?’ ‘Tell me more about that’” (p. 42). In using such a guide, Seidman (2006) urges researchers to “avoid manipulating their participants to respond to it [...] ask questions that reflect areas of interest to them in an open and direct way, [and] avoid imposing their own interests on

the experience of the participants” (p. 92). Atkinson (1998) agrees: “The less structure a life story interview has, the more effective it will be in achieving the goal of getting that person’s own story in the way, form and style that the individual wants to tell it in” (p. 41).

The ethical component is another key to the effectiveness of an open-ended interview; Marshal and Rossman (2006) observe that an interviewer’s success depends greatly on “conveying the attitude that the participant’s views are valuable and useful” (p. 101). Atkinson (1998) echoes this sentiment from a perspective both lyric and practical: “A sincere, endearing sense of wonderment and appreciation at what is being revealed to you will go a long way in assisting the storyteller to share his or her deep story” (p. 41)

Anonymity and privacy. At the start of the interview, each participant completed and signed an informed consent form (see “Appendix E: Informed Consent Form”), which identified the researcher and his university affiliation and explained the purposes of the study, interview procedures, risks of participation, and the participant’s rights. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The anonymity of participants and confidentiality of their interview responses were protected by using pseudonyms and eliminating other identifying information to mask the identities of individuals in interview transcripts; a further discussion of these measures is provided in Chapter Four. Audio data files of interviews were stored under password protection at the home of the researcher with the stipulation that they be maintained until two years after the completion of research and then destroyed using secure NSA 7-pass deletion or equivalent.

Interview setting. The ideal location for one-on-one interviews should be “convenient to the participant, private, yet if at all possible familiar to him or her” (Seidman, 2006, p. 49). A study room in the college library was used for interviews. This setting provided a comfortable and quiet location, though given that the walls were mostly glass there was no sense of being closed in, nor was there reason for participants to feel uncomfortable about being in a private setting with a person unknown to them. Since the college library is if anything more the domain of students than of faculty and staff members, it was expected that student participants would feel more at ease there than, for example, a faculty office or administrative meeting room, settings which could tend to reinforce the sense of student-teacher difference.

Conduct of the interviews. Participants were informed that the time allotted for the interview was 90 minutes, and that they were not requested to continue beyond that time frame. (No interview significantly exceeded that time frame.) Participants were also told that they should not feel compelled to discuss any topic nor to disclose any information that they did not wish to reveal, that they could refuse to respond to any question, and that they could end the interview at any time. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer spoke briefly with the participant on “small talk” topics such as weather, how busy he/she was keeping, etc. In cases in which the participant was contacted by way of a chain-referral from a mutual acquaintance, this contact person was mentioned to establish trust and put the participant at ease (Browne, 2005; Wong, 2008). Before the main body of the interview got underway, the researcher asked the participant to confirm that he or she met the stated criteria for participation (this is also included on the consent form,

Appendix B), and made a brief statement of the focus and purpose of the study, followed by a summary of his own experiences (as described under “The Role[s] of the Researcher/Interviewer” below) intended to help establish trust and put the interviewee at ease.

Interviewer effect on data collection. How much does the interviewer influence the data evinced during the interview? Views range from that of Gubrium and Holstein (2002), who characterize the interview as unavoidably a fully collaborative storytelling between the researcher and participant, to the perspective which holds that with care and awareness of the respective roles of researcher and participant, the balance of authority can be substantively tipped toward the participant (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Borland, 1991; Chase, 1995; Glesne, 1999; Mason, 1996;). Aside from the issues of how an interviewer’s appearance, manner, or status (as perceived by the participant) might influence outcomes (as discussed later in this chapter), the construction of the interview itself – the questions asked, and the order in which they are asked – can play a determinant role. Questions may be leading, they may be confusing or off-putting. Simply stated: “By asking the wrong questions, the interviewer will fail to elicit the participant’s experience in his or her own language” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 681).

For a more extended discussion of this issue, please refer to the subsection titled “The Role(s) of the Researcher/Interviewer” in this chapter, below.

Timeline. Interviews were conducted, fieldnotes recorded, and analytical memos composed during the spring semester of 2009. During this process peer debriefing was also conducted to provide additional perspective (see “Trustworthiness” in this chapter).

Foreshadowed Questions

As stated repeatedly throughout this chapter, the guiding principle of the interview procedure, based in the life story approach, is to offer the widest possible opening for interviewee responses. However, this is an ideal and for practical reasons (i.e., interview efficiency) it was useful for the interviewer to keep in mind the themes and topic areas that other researchers have identified as playing a role in the academic success of immigrant students, Latino students, and generation 1.5 students. Toward that end, Hine (2000) posits that “foreshadowed problems provide a pointer toward what is going to be studied” (p. 9). Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2006) describe the function of foreshadowed questions as giving “a clear idea of what [...] you will be looking for” (p. 119), but they also counsel that these questions should “guide the collection of data *without predetermining outcomes*” (p. 59, emphasis added). Indeed, when interviews are done, data collected, and analysis complete, researchers often discover that their findings are unexpected: “Not uncommonly it turns out to be something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problems” (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995, p. 206). To a large extent the outcomes of the present study bore out this prediction.

The main research questions for this inquiry (from Chapter One) ask how mid-childhood immigrants from Latin America who are now studying successfully at the college level in the U.S. “describe their experience from arrival in a new country during their school years, through school completion, and into a successful start at college,” and seek to discover “which variables – circumstances, characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, events” these students perceive as supporting or threatening their academic progress.

According to the broad review of current literature offered in Chapter Two, the salient “circumstances, characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, events” may include: (a) immigration experience (including acculturation and/or assimilation, attitudes about biculturalism, attitudes about native and adopted cultures, perspectives on ethnicity or cultural identification, attitudes about immigration, and type of immigration [e.g., voluntary/involuntary, one-way/transnational]); (b) family, community, and social networks (including family and home environment, the role of family ethnic/cultural identity and/or practices, community/social setting, and mentors and significant persons who provided guidance); (c) language and literacy (including language learning experience, bilingualism, attitudes toward first language, attitudes toward bilingualism, and attitudes toward English); (d) academic experiences before college (including prior schooling experience [pre- & post-immigration], effects of interrupted schooling, attitudes toward school and teachers, perceptions of teachers’ attitudes and behaviors, classroom behaviors and academic strategies, mentors and significant persons who provided guidance, and the role of specific courses, programs or services); and (e) academic experiences at college (including attitudes toward college and teachers, perceptions of teachers’ attitudes and behaviors, mentors and significant persons who provided guidance, planning and the role of goal-setting, classroom behaviors and academic strategies, and the role of specific courses, programs or services).

The purpose of this inquiry was not to confirm nor refute any such claims, though certainly it was expected that some, most, or even all study participants would touch upon one or more of these topics, and indeed this expectation proved warranted during the

research process. As described in this section and in “Appendix D: Interview Protocol and Guide,” the interviewer’s task was to encourage participants to present their stories in ways and on terms of their choosing, while helping to draw out a level of detail and nuance (thick description) that would support close analysis.

Awareness and handling of emerging themes. Current neuroscience research suggests that the human mind uses narrative as a means of developing life themes (McAdams, 2008; Runyan, 1982), and a central aim of narrative research involving multiple participants is of course to identify areas of commonality, themes or plots, in the collected stories. A scan of the topics in the previous subsection reveals themes evinced from earlier studies. Nonetheless, I strove to follow the advice of virtually every authority on qualitative research and entered into the fieldwork with as open a mind as possible – looking at my findings against the background of both my experience and reading, but making every effort to avoid formulating categories or identifying themes until roughly halfway through the data collection phase, at which point I tentatively identified emerging patterns and themes in order to better focus and make more efficient use of time in the ensuing interviews. However, my guiding principle continued to be that although the conduct of the interview commonly involved my introducing topics from the interview protocol, those topics were raised as neutrally as possible, i.e., without leading questions which might compel participants toward one perspective or theme or another in their responses.

Post-interview fieldnotes and analytical memos. During and immediately following each interview, the researcher made fieldnotes to record impressions,

observations, insights, intuitions, feelings, and precursory interpretations for reference during analysis of the data. These notes were in some instances developed further in written analytical memos focusing on particular issues of interest. Of particular interest were emerging patterns or themes as well as observations regarding possibly meaningful non-verbal cues or behaviors and other contextual information.

The Role(s) of the Researcher/Interviewer

A prevailing message for qualitative researchers might be aptly summed up in the ancient aphorism: Know thyself. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posit that any researcher “speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective” (p. 23), while Tierney (2003) suggests that as researchers’ own stories inevitably play a role in interpretation, they can use this position to “decolonize subjects by way of the construction and presentation of the narrative” (p. 295). Chase (2005) observes that “narrative researchers [...] view *themselves* as narrators as they develop interpretations and find ways in which to present or publish their ideas about the narratives they have studied” (p. 657). All agree that responsible and reliable research must involve researchers’ awareness of and explicit reflection upon the characteristics of their own lives, experiences, circumstances, backgrounds, and attitudes and careful consideration of how these might come into play at various stages of the inquiry process. “To be forthcoming and honest about how we work as researchers is to develop a reflexive awareness,” Peshkin (2000) writes, which “contributes to the quality of our interpretive acts” (p. 9).

Taking such commentary under consideration, I recognized that though my role as

the researcher in relation to this project was rather complex, such complexity is certainly the norm. The research site was my place of employment, qualifying this as a case of “backyard research” with me as a kind of “insider.” However, my European-American ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic status positioned me as an “outsider” in relation to my participants. On the other hand, my long experience working with immigrant students, my bilingualism and biculturalism, and my extensive life experience as an immigrant and newcomer myself – including my experience as a mid-childhood migrant – arguably gave me some degree of “insider” status as well. But other circumstances ultimately call this status into question as well.

Though it was my place of employment, “Gateway Community College” was not precisely the site or the focus of the study, but rather simply a point of contact/commonality between the participants and the researcher. This study sought not to discover how participants felt about the specific setting of this college, but rather how they characterized all of the conditions, circumstances, attitudes and events which they perceived to have positively or negatively influenced their college success. That said, since GCC was in some cases the only college setting the participants have experienced, they were of course likely to reference that setting. (It should be noted, however, that many community college students move from one college to another, especially in large urban centers where more than one such institution is within commuting distance. Out of the fifteen participants in this study, seven had spent time at more than one college or university.) My experience working with immigrant students at the community college and university levels long predated my tenure at GCC. For nearly two decades I have

taught developmental English and ESL in institutions ranging from a rural community college on the US-Mexico border in southern Arizona to a large urban research university in the Midwest.

It is clear that my role vis-à-vis the institution was that of an insider; however, the aim of the inquiry was not to arrive at a better understanding of the institution, nor specifically to answer questions about how well this particular institution was serving the needs of this group of students.

The question of my role as insider or outsider vis-à-vis my participants presents further complication. How did my personal history, background and characteristics position me in relation to the study participants?

The researcher as insider (vis-à-vis participants). Numerous life experiences have contributed significantly to my understanding of the situation of the participants of this study. For economic reasons, my family moved during my childhood to a location which was culturally, geographically, and climactically very distinct from the setting I had called home for my early years, giving me experience as a mid-childhood migrant. As a young adult, I lived for extended periods outside my native country, first in Asia and then in Latin America – in both cases, in settings culturally and linguistically quite distinct from home, giving me experience as an immigrant.

When I was eleven years old, my large family moved from our home in a traditional, Catholic Church-dominated and insular Chicago city neighborhood to a raw, newly-constructed desert community near Phoenix, Arizona. The cultural differences from one place to the other were in many ways extreme, and for me, this move brought

experiences I have since recognized as typical of mid-childhood migration. Though I could readily communicate in the local language in the new setting, my linguistic habits – like my clothing, certain behaviors, and various other markers of “outsider” status – were the target of no little derision from my school peers. My adaptation was a process that commenced precipitously and with little warning or outside assistance; even in a large family, it was a lonely process. Like other mid-childhood newcomers, I witnessed my younger siblings rather readily transform into Westerners, while my elder siblings – having mostly completed their schooling in their childhood community, remained (and remain) culturally Midwestern. One sibling and myself were (and are) in the middle, and like most mid-childhood migrants our development was heavily influenced by both our old and new homes. Strangely, however, it was not until well into the course of my study of mid-childhood migrants that it truly occurred to me that I was one, that my experiences as a mid-childhood newcomer closely mirrored those described in the literature, and that this experience had affected my own development. I came to see how I have internalized many of the characteristics which have been seen to define this group – the sense of cultural curiosity and adaptability, but also of fragmentation, dislocation and loss.

Some years later, and this time of my own volition, I migrated internationally. Just out of university, I moved to Japan, where I had the experience of being a largely unacculturated outsider; even after years of residence my fluency in the local language was limited and most of my social group were other foreigners. Though many of my peers from that period ended up staying on as more or less permanent immigrants, I left the region to seek opportunities elsewhere. After spending several years back in the U.S.,

I left home again to live, study and work in Latin America for an extended time. In this case, and partly in response to my experience in Asia, I was determined to learn the language and become knowledgeable about the culture. Over the course of roughly two decades of intermittently living, studying and working on the U.S.-Mexico border as well as abroad in Mexico, Colombia and Cuba, including extended visits adding up to many, many months and one unbroken two-year residence in Colombia, I became fully proficient in Spanish and quite acculturated, if not to some degree assimilated. I continue to travel and work regularly in Latin America. I married in Colombia and have close and extensive family ties there, and have numerous Latino friends and blood relatives here in the U.S. Though I would never refer to myself as Latino, nor would my appearance be considered that of a typical Latino (a problematic notion at best in any case), it is nonetheless undeniable that the cultures and idioms of Latin America take a central position in my life and self-identity.

The enormous effects that the circumstances related in the previous paragraphs have had on my development, on my identity and worldview, have made me acutely and concretely aware of processes such as acculturation and assimilation, as well as seemingly abstract concepts like cultural consonance and dissonance. This awareness – which I explored extensively during this process – certainly enhanced my suitability to undertake a project like the one described herein.

As a result of such formative life experiences in other cultures, both positive and negative, I believe I am more attuned to the realities that cultural/linguistic newcomers face than a researcher who has had no such experiences, and as such I can consider

myself a kind of “insider.” I believe this background may be valuable to me as a researcher not only in providing a deeper context for my inquiry, but also in the interview process itself. Mindful of the importance of the “research relationship that you establish with those that you study” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 65), I have found, for instance, that reticent students often open up considerably when I offer some disclosure of my own experiences as a migrant, newcomer, cultural outsider, and language learner. Such disclosure can greatly offset a natural inclination of young Latino immigrants to doubt that someone like me (in their perception simply another privileged, White, middle-class college professor) could really understand or care about their experiences. In describing my background to the participants prior to interviews, my goal was to make possible what Mischler (1986) describes as “an interview situation where solidarity [is] established” and the interviewer and interviewee are “engaged together in the same task of trying to understand important life experiences” (1986, p. 245).

Similarly, in dealing with Latino students in particular I have seen that a casual or humorous reference to some arcane detail of Mexican (or South American or U.S. Latino) popular culture can do much to lower the usual guardedness that newcomers employ in self-defense. A casual comment may seem a superficial tactic, but I believe students get a sense of what is behind it; a seemingly casual but spot-on cultural cue can do much to establish insider knowledge and encourage confidence. And there is nothing superficial about it: I have in fact spent a significant part of my life internalizing the Spanish language and the cultures of Latin America. There is no more meaningful way than this to express the degree to which I value these things. Respect begets respect.

The researcher as outsider (vis-à-vis participants). The issues discussed in the preceding section notwithstanding, I also recognize the limits of my “insider” status. Yes, I have become proficient in my participants’ native language and am familiar with the cultures of their places of origin. Yes, my experience as a mid-childhood migrant and as an foreigner living abroad afford me a kind of empathy that would be impossible to attain otherwise.

I cannot pretend, however, to possess more than a very incomplete comprehension of what my participants’ lives might entail. For example, though my family migrated (and I later emigrated) for economic motives, in neither case was this a desperate or inescapable measure. (In retrospect, however, such was ostensibly the case for only one or two of the participants’ families.) While living abroad I did not face the kind of prolonged uncertainty and discomfort that can be commonplace among many Latino immigrants in the U.S., nor did I suffer economic and social pressures to the degree that many do. Though at times acute, belligerent, and even violent, the instances of intolerance I faced while living abroad tended to be transitory and for the most part only moderately manifest in the larger society. As famously and aptly summarized by McIntosh (2004) in her essay “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” the undeniable reality in the global context is that northern Europeans and their descendants – people of lighter complexions – are granted prestige nearly everywhere and enjoy the benefits of that privilege whether they seek them or not.

So the question remains: When interviewing immigrant students, what effect did I – as a White, male, older, representative of the dominant culture – have on the tone and

content of what a younger Latino or Latina participant said? This was possibly complicated by the fact that I am a teacher and they were students in the institution which served as the primary point of contact between us, and even though I did not interview individuals who were my own students, there was the possibility that I might assume (even unconsciously) a teacherly role, while the participant might assume a student role. On the other hand, I believe such effects can be minimized with effort, and I do not feel that such roles manifested significantly during the interviews.

In any case, I believe that perhaps something is to be gained from *not* being fully an “insider.” When a researcher is intimately familiar with the culture or experience of an interview participant, that participant may tend to gloss over points that are “understood” by insiders, and data may therefore be left unstated. Further, when the interlocutor is very closely connected with the participant’s culture, entirely new kinds of interference can arise. For example, a Texan’s preconceptions about a New Yorker (and vice versa) could well color the way the two interact. This can occur among individuals from seemingly related cultural backgrounds such as Germans and Austrians or Taiwanese and Chinese, as well as people from different regions within the same country: the *chilango* (person from Mexico City) and the *norteco* (from northern Mexico), or the *Bogotano* and the *paisa* (from Medellín) in Colombia.

Thus, the ideal researcher might well be an insider/outsider, one who is able to establish trust and sympathy with the participant, but whose perspective is not unduly filtered through preconceptions or previously established societal relationships. Of course, being a North American, one can never completely escape the connotations

attached to the role of the U.S. in the world community, but on the other hand (there's always another hand in qualitative research!) my experience indicates that on an individual basis people from all around the world are typically quite able to deal with Americans as entities distinct from their national politics.

The qualitative interview as balancing act. In conducting the interviews, I was vigilant to avoid what Borland (1990) called the “tendency to downplay differences” or to assume a “likeness of mind” with participants where there may be little or none (p. 72). However, I did call upon those of my life experiences which could provide me some insight and enhance my capacity for understanding and empathizing with my participants' lives, those which could concretize certain key concepts and processes in my perception and help me to pick up on clues in participants' accounts during interviewing which with probing might lead to meaningful discovery. At the same time, I was ever mindful of the very real limits to the similarities in my life experiences and those of my participants, and unavoidable differences between those lives. Importantly, while bringing my background knowledge to bear where appropriate, I was careful not to overestimate its relevance or imagine that it conferred particular authority upon me. When mentioning my experiences as a migrant, for example, I also took pains to clarify that this did not compare in its intensity to that of moving to a new country and a new language. (Even so, participants seemed to readily accept the commonality of our experiences; as one stated: “You feel my pain!”)

Additional discussion of specific issues surrounding my role as researcher and insider/outsider vis-à-vis the study participants as these manifested during the interview

process can be found in the introductory section of the first findings chapter, Chapter Four.

Narrative Data Analysis

You do not find climactic, linear plots ready-formed in people's lives, although real lives may provide material out of which such a plot may be constructed by ruthless elimination of all but a few carefully highlighted incidents. The full story of all the events in Othello's whole life would be a complete bore. (Ong, 1982, p. 143)

Needless to say, the narrative researcher hopes it does not take the skills of Shakespeare to discern the significant elements of a life story. But as Ong (who specializes in the historical development from orality to written literacy) suggested, finding the meaning in a set of data – the majority of which may be of limited usefulness – is an endeavor fraught with peril.

Fortunately, the research participants themselves do much of the heavy lifting, aided by thoughtfully crafted questions: Given the constraints of an interview, it is necessary to “get to the point,” and the choices that participants make in doing so can be as edifying as the specifics they recount. Fail, Thompson and Walker (2004) described how in the process of recounting a narrative “the information has been edited and events selected to create a story” (p. 332). Josselson (1995) described narratives as “not records of facts, of how things actually were, but of a meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of life” (p. 33).

And yet the work of researchers is burdensome and grave; details both momentous and immaterial swirl around their keyboards in an ether of ethical and theoretical considerations. Peshkin (2000) characterized the interpretation of narrative

data as “an act of imagination and logic. It entails perceiving importance, order, and form in what one is learning that relates to the argument, story, narrative that is constantly undergoing creation” (p. 9). Narrative analysis can mean seeing the invisible, perceiving “information that people do not consciously know themselves. Analysis of people’s stories allows deeply hidden assumptions to surface” (Bell, 2002, p. 209).

Titon (1980) alluded to the element of discovery in life story data analysis, describing how “the historical imagination will sometimes crawl out from the avalanche of data available... and turn its subject into a palpable human being, usually by giving him words to say. [...] When we hear him, then we know him” (p. 281). Echoing this sentiment, and the importance of staying close to the dataset itself, Atkinson (2001) stressed, “it is important, in trying to understand another’s experience in life or their relation to others, to let their voice be heard, to let them speak about it first” (§ 18). This theme arises repeatedly in discussions of narrative-based research: “Let us not use the life story too quickly,” Titon admonished; “let us know it first” (p. 291).

This is all to say that interpreting the stories people tell is a complex and weighty undertaking. All but the most dedicated postpositivists would concur that undoubtedly some actual events occurred which inspire the stories people tell about their experiences (though this can devolve into endless ruminations about the nature or existence of objective reality); however, the way people *tell* their stories is determined not merely by those “real” events but rather by (a) their perception of those events, (b) the meaning they extract from those events in the context of all their other life experiences, (c) the way that meaning fits into a larger ongoing narrative they have constructed for their own lives and

their own identities⁷, and (d) the way they wish to portray those events and perceptions and meanings to another party (i.e., the interviewer or researcher). And then there are the myriad issues of how a story is “heard” by the listener. Mishler (1986), drawing on the work of the sociolinguist William Labov, summed this up as “the intertwined problems of language, meaning, and context” (p. 233).

With all these layers of complexity, an inherent danger in the open-narrative or life story approach is the possibility that the researcher may find it very difficult to glean any sort of structure, pattern, order, or meaning from the data. Even when an interviewer limits the scope of conversation to a focused topic (e.g., “what helps or hinders academic success”), a wide range of possible responses and ways of framing those responses is possible. Yet one thing is certain: Human narratives do reveal meaning. This meaning may be difficult to discern and may be found to be of ambiguous or minimal consequence, but there is no possibility of obtaining truly meaning-less data.

Power, Authority, and Narrative Interpretation

As Borland (1990) articulated, the balance of power between researcher and participant is a matter of concern for any inquiry which seeks an honest reckoning. This is especially true in a project in which the perceptions and experiences of the participants are the sole source of data, one which does not seek to verify reported occurrences or validate information, one which considers the stated positions of the participants to be solely sufficient to gain the insights and understandings sought. In order to recognize the

⁷ Mishler (1986) refers to this as the participant’s “personal identity to which he is laying a claim through his account” (p. 243).

authority of participants over their own perceptions, qualitative researchers often endeavor, where possible, to allow for interviewees' participation in the process of "negotiating" the interpretation of data they produced. The aim is to ensure that data analysis is conducted with awareness of "the tremendous, if unspoken, influence of the researcher as author" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 714) and to work toward an ideal in which "the observer has no privileged voice in the interpretations that are written" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995, p. 17).

The character of this inquiry – one in which Latino students/participants are studied by a White teacher/researcher – necessarily raises the issue of power relationships and authority, and such questions carry into the process of interpreting narrative data.⁸ In their discussion of interpretive practice, Holstein and Gubrium (2007) echo Karl Marx's pithy dictum that "people may author their own life courses or biographies, but they do not simply do so as they please" (p. 10). In the case of research participants, those "terms" are largely in the hands of the researcher; Tierney (2003) observes rather broadly that "any text is coproduced" (p. 302). Qualitative researchers are repeatedly cautioned to be mindful of how interpretation implies authority, considering that the researcher holds ultimate power over how to interpret data consisting of participant's life stories (Borland, 1990; Chase, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Somewhat more specific to the circumstances of immigrant students, Pavlenko (2007) takes a hopeful stance in describing the value of narrative research to "enable us to uncover how particular

⁸ For a discussion of the question of power relationships during the interviewing process itself, please refer to the subsection titled "The researcher as outsider" below.

configurations of power relations allow some learners, but not others, access to linguistic resources, whether to learn a language or to tell their own story” (p. 217).

Borland (1990) cautions of the potential for “interpretive conflict” wherein the listener of a story imposes a shape upon it that the speaker may or may not intend, characterizing this specifically as a power relationship, with the researcher assuming (or perhaps more accurately usurping) authority over the meaning of the story, interpreting it in ways which the participants themselves might disagree with.⁹ On the other hand, Gubrium and Holstein (2003) counsel researchers to rein in “the propensity [...] to view all interpretations as artifacts of particular regimes of power/knowledge” (p. 237).

Interview Transcription and Thematic Analysis Procedure

All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher. After the first eight (of fifteen) interviews had been transcribed, I reviewed and made preliminary coding notations on the transcripts and began the process of developing an outline of the themes and topics which emerged as significant therein. The analysis was based on the identification of “key phrases” and “key patterns” (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991) as well as “core narrative” ideas (Mishler, 1986) in the data, an inductive analytical approach described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as one which seeks not to “confirm (or disconfirm) what has been deduced from the theory” but which instead expects that themes must “emerge from the inquiry”; the researcher’s aim is one of “uncovering

⁹ Borland (1990) describes a further step of engaging her participants in a rather lengthy (and, for most researchers, impractical) “process of interpretive conflict and discussion” in which both the researcher and participant “stretched to understand the other’s perspective” (74); however, it must be observed that as she describes it, the outcome of this process was that the participants seemingly came to appreciate her interpretation of the events of their lives.

embedded information and making it explicit” (p. 203). This is not to suggest that the analysis was (or that any such analysis can be) entirely untouched by *a priori* considerations: The thematic categories and subcategories were naturally influenced by the questions, prompts, follow-ups, and prods in the interview protocol, which were in turn informed by my review of relevant literature (as presented in Chapter Two).

Because I adhered inasmuch as possible to an interviewing technique which intentionally allowed for and encouraged participants to take the conversation in directions of their own choosing (see “Interview Procedure and Protocol” above), not all participants discussed the same themes. Nonetheless, after a process of revision and reorganizing based on cross-comparison between interviews and from them to the emerging thematic outline, I was able to construct a table of the major theme categories the participants addressed, most of which were in turn divided into subthemes. Of greatest interest were the themes and topics in which responses seemed especially vivid, specific, or careful – those areas on which the participants chose to place the greatest emphasis. I was also on the alert for narrative data which might speak to particular established theoretical notions, as emerged in the cases of the dual frame of reference (Suárez-Orozco, 1989) and segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1998).

I created a database using the categories and subcategories thus generated, and entered all significant narrative data from the interviews which pertained. This searchable database, which ultimately ran to roughly 30,000 words, allowed me to discern whether a given theme was in fact addressed significantly in the dataset. The process of creating and revising the thematic categories was ongoing and reiterative throughout the

processing of the remaining interviews, and at several points I adjusted the thematic descriptors and categories in response to the analysis of additional narrative data.

Versions of the thematic analysis database were saved periodically during the process to provide a record of the progress of this analysis.

In addition to the thematic database, a secondary database was constructed to inventory specific characteristics of the individuals and their backgrounds, such as age on arrival, length of residence, country of origin, whether they came from urban or rural locations, what kind of English-language programs they were placed into on arrival, and so on – in short, information which was readily quantifiable. The purpose of this inventory was to provide an overview of the group for comparison and to inform judgments about the rate of incidence of given traits or experiences (e.g. transnational experience, involvement in extracurricular activities). In addition to helping to inform decisions about the structure of the thematic database, this secondary database was used as a source for the “Overview of Study Participants” presented in Chapter Four.

Once all interview data had been thus examined and parsed, and relevant utterances had been entered into the thematic database, I reviewed how the data were organized and made additional adjustments, for example by combining topics where significant overlap was apparent, dividing topics as warranted by divergent responses, and eliminating topics which after all did not figure significantly in the data. The outline of themes and subthemes which emerged from this process forms the basis for organizing and presenting the findings of this study, and provides the structure for analysis and interpretation. Of course not all narrative data were included in the final presentation of

findings; quoted material was selected to be representative and somewhat concise – though this latter concern was at all times balanced against the desire to provide a level of “thick” description.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the concept of validity in traditional (i.e., quantitative or “scientific”) research design as having four primary concerns: (a) “truth value,” meaning that findings match the concrete reality of participants’ experience; (b) “applicability,” referring to the relevance of findings to other contexts; (c) “consistency,” stipulating that findings can be duplicated using the same methods with the same sources of data; and (d) “neutrality,” which requires that findings be determined entirely by the participants, and not influenced by a bias or preconception of the researcher (p. 290). Lincoln and Guba go on to describe conventional research criteria that have evolved in response to validity concerns, those being, respectively: (a) “internal validity,” or the ability to determine causal relationships between independent and dependent variables; (b) “external validity,” that the relationship thus posited can be generalized to other times and contexts; (c) “reliability,” that repeating the study using the same methods with the same participants will yield the same results; and (d) “objectivity,” that the methods used effectively “render the study beyond contamination by human foibles” (p. 293).

The concepts associated with validity, and the research criteria which arise from them, have undergone fundamental reconsideration and revision in the domain of qualitative inquiries into social phenomena, beginning with what Patton (1990) termed the “paradigm orientation and assumptions [which] undergird the study” (p. 461).

Researchers have come to believe that studies exploring human interaction often encompass variables and contexts of such layered complexity that the traditional notion of validity and the mechanisms by which validity is established are inadequate or inappropriate. In the case of interview-generated data, this realization is based upon a recognition that humans simply do not recall their experiences with machinelike accuracy, nor do they report them that way. The remembering and recounting of a lived experience are subject first to the individual's initial perception of that experience, which is influenced and determined by background, personality characteristics, prior experiences, and so on. After the initial perception, remembering and recounting are subject to further influences of later experiences (which may reinforce or minimize the earlier perception), and to the individual's motives or purposes in recounting, which can in turn be influenced by the receiver (and/or requester) of the account.

In short, problems with applying traditional concepts of validity to studies of social phenomena begin with the question of defining the first and most fundamental concept: "reality." Before moving on to a discussion of how qualitative researchers have adapted the traditional notions of validity to their methods, it is important to understand what is at stake in the debate over "paradigm orientation and assumptions" about reality itself.

Those who profess a belief in "hard science" have historically held that qualitative methods lack the sort of rigor which enables quantitative researchers to precisely determine the rate of mutation in tsetse fly populations exposed to varying levels of radiation or the rate of ice shelf decline in the Antarctic, studies marked by reproducible

procedures which yield consistently reported findings. After the better part of a century of qualitative research, however, perspectives blindly critical of this paradigm are increasingly viewed as marginal. Those in the “hard” sciences are well aware of the complexities of the phenomena they study, and the limits of their own methods. A recent editorial in *Scientific American* magazine (“The Peculiar Institution,” 2002) captured this sensibility:

Whenever we run articles on social topics, some readers protest that we should stick to “real” science. Ironically, we seldom hear these complaints from physical or biological scientists. They are the first to point out that the natural universe, for all its complexity, is easier to understand than the human being. (p. 8)

Indeed, the scientific study of physical systems has come to involve ever more attention to the interactivity between systems, just as studies of human psychology, behavior, identity, and perceptions have been increasingly conscious of the formative role of social interactivity (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The study of human endeavors requires methods which can account for not merely single highly complex organisms or individual sets of cognitive functioning, but highly complex interactions between those entities – interactions which occur over time and are influenced not just by present conditions but by knowledge (invariably incomplete and often inaccurate) of the past and an awareness of the future. Studying human behaviors or perceptions using highly structured quantitative procedures – using tests and surveys, for example – trade away the possibility of capturing the vastness of this complexity in return for the possibility of attaining narrow but “hard” data in the form of numbers and statistics with an emphasis on replicable methods and outcomes. Qualitativists seek a deeper understanding of complexity by using more open-ended

instruments and methods, at the sacrifice of readily manageable (and statistically analyzable) datasets and close replicability.

The difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches is not merely one of methods and subject matter, however, but of the basic view of reality. More than an effete intellectual spat, the positivist/post-positivist question gets to the heart of the researcher's purpose: Is it to reveal some free-standing truth about a positivist reality, or rather to discover an individual's perceptions of an otherwise unknowable (or nonexistent) reality? Whereas quantitativists tend to rest their beliefs on the premise that knowledge or truth can be discovered about phenomena which exist independently of the observation thereof, qualitative researchers reveal varying levels of comfort with the notion of (or at least the relevance of) such a positivist "reality" existent apart from an observer or participant's perception. This variation can be seen between some of the most influential proponents and codifiers of qualitative methods: Toward the positivist end of the spectrum, Miles and Huberman (1984) espouse a relatively traditional view of objective and scientifically verifiable reality, while Lincoln and Guba (1985) embrace a view nearer the other end of the spectrum, referring to the belief in objective truth as "naïve realism," of little relevance in a mode of inquiry which rests on "the assumption of multiple constructed realities" (p. 295). The view that research validity requires a determination of "truth" is "in principle impossible," Lincoln and Guba say, because "reality" in human perception is "a set of mental constructions" (p. 296). Maxwell (1996) takes a somewhat more conciliatory approach, proposing that within the qualitative context, the term "validity" can be used with the understanding that it "does not imply the

existence of any objective truth to which an account can be compared” (p. 87). Mason (1996) also accepts the use of the term validity in a qualitative paradigm, placing the onus upon methodological rigor: “Validity of method and interpretation [...] must be demonstrated through a careful retracing and reconstruction of the route by which you think you reached them” (p. 152). This position is aligned with Miles and Huberman (1984), who urge researchers to ensure credibility by focusing on adherence to rigorous data collection and analysis methods.

Even within a paradigm of contested realities, however, Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that qualitative researchers can demonstrate “truth value” by showing that they have “represented those multiple constructions adequately, that is, that the reconstructions (for the findings and interpretations are also constructions, it should never be forgotten) that have been arrived at are credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities” (p. 296).

The present study is most concerned with the participants’ perceptions and their representations – how they perceive their experiences and how they express or represent those experiences to others (and, perhaps, to themselves). On the other hand, my own perspective is not dogmatically anti-positivist by any means; the purpose of this study is to shed light upon certain immigrant students’ experiences at college so as to provide educational decision makers with information which might improve the likelihood of those students’ success. Surely a position which rejects the notion of a concrete reality (e.g., classrooms, teachers, programs) would provide unsteady footing for such an inquiry. “Concrete” should not, however, be construed to suggest “uncontested” – the

nature of human endeavors is tension and interaction.

Validity and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Inquiries

Returning to the validity concepts and research criteria described at the beginning of this section, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the umbrella term of “trustworthiness” in place of “validity,” and outline alternative “criteria appropriate to the naturalistic paradigm” (p. 295) corresponding to the conventional notions, as follow: (a) *credibility* rather than truth value, (b) *transferability* rather than generalizability, (c) *dependability* rather than consistency or replicability, and (d) *confirmability* rather than neutrality or objectivity.

Patton (1990) approaches trustworthiness¹⁰ from a somewhat different angle, offering “three distinct but related inquiry elements” expressed in the questions, “(1) What techniques and methods were used to ensure the integrity, validity, and accuracy of the findings? (2) What does the researcher bring to the study in terms of qualifications, experience, and perspective? (3) What paradigm orientation and assumptions undergird the study?” (p. 461).

For the sake of clarity, this discussion will be organized around the four trustworthiness criteria offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) toward the objective of ensuring the soundness of an inquiry, referencing specifically various techniques Lincoln and Guba describe which permit “trustworthiness criteria to be operationalized” (p. 301). These criteria and techniques, and their implications for researchers, will be addressed in

¹⁰ Patton prefers “credibility” as an umbrella term, rather than “trustworthiness,” which can give rise to some confusion in that Lincoln and Guba (1985) employ “credibility” to name one of the four criteria under the heading of trustworthiness.

the following subsections, together with some explication of refinements, varying perspectives, and extensions which other influential qualitative research methodologists have offered. Each of these criterion subsections will be followed by a discussion of what measures the present study will incorporate to ensure trustworthiness, keeping in mind the affirmation that “attending to all these means of increasing trustworthiness is not necessary in any one study” (Glesne, 1999, p. 32), but with an eye nonetheless toward ensuring that sufficient pains are taken.

Credibility

Arising from credibility failures such as Margaret Mead’s discredited studies of Samoan youth¹¹, researchers are cautioned to employ specific strategies to increase the likelihood that findings and interpretations reflect the intent of participants (or what Lincoln and Guba [1985] term the “constructors” of the realities being studied). Strategies such as prolonged contact and observation, double-checking with participants, and seeking second opinions from peers, together with triangulation provided by using multiple sources, methods, and possibly multiple researchers, are sufficient to maximize “the probability that findings (and interpretations based on them) will be found to be more credible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 307). Although Maxwell (1996), with reference to Fielding and Fielding (1986), observes that “it is not true that triangulation automatically increases validity” (p. 94), most researchers – in the interest of building a convincing case for the credibility of their work – employ one or more activities of the

¹¹ This is not to suggest that Mead’s work or stature are universally devalued; many qualitative researchers continue to refer positively to Mead’s scholarship and contributions to the field even while cognizant of the limitations later revealed about the Samoa studies (Glesne, 1999).

sort described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and reiterated by Creswell (1998, pp. 201-203), as described in the following paragraphs.

Prolonged engagement is meant to ensure that the researcher's familiarity with the study setting, participants, and the variables likely to affect these, are sufficient to avoid misconstruction. Patton (1990) touches on this in stipulating the significance of the researcher's qualifications and experience. The related concept of *persistent observation* refers to an amount of time or purposeful contact with the study participants or site which is adequate to allow for "identifying and assessing salient factors and crucial atypical happenings" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 307). While cautioning against bias-inducing "overrapport (going native)" Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that sufficient engagement and observation permit the researcher "to learn the context, to minimize distortions, and to build trust" (p. 307).

Once data have been collected, presumably employing adequate engagement and observation, additional credibility-enhancing activities can be undertaken to help ensure (a) that the data and the researcher's analysis and interpretation thereof reflect what those providing it (i.e., participants/interviewees) intended, and (b) that any analysis and interpretation are warranted and supported by the data.

For the first of these concerns, *member checking* provides for "the direct test of findings and interpretations with the human resources from which they have come" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301) by way of asking participants to review interview transcriptions, analytical memos or summaries, or report drafts. The second of these concerns can be addressed via *negative case analysis*, which constitutes the researcher's

search for “unconfirming evidence” (Glesne, 1999, p. 32) within the data as it is being collected and during preliminary analysis, as a way of checking the adequacy of emergent working hypotheses. Maxwell (1996) expresses this as the “need to rigorously examine both the supporting and the discrepant data to assess whether it is more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion, being aware of all the pressures to ignore data that do not fit your conclusions” (p. 93).

To mitigate the limitations of relying on a singular perspective in analysis, and to verify the soundness and rigor of research procedures, *peer review and debriefing* involve seeking feedback on the inquiry in progress from a knowledgeable peer, while the closely related concept of an *external audit* (discussed under “Dependability and Confirmability” below) asks a qualified person outside the inquiry to examine the researcher’s field notes, coding, analysis, and procedures.

For the present study, trustworthiness was supported by means of prolonged engagement, negative case analysis (presented throughout the findings), member checking, and peer review and debriefing.

My prolonged engagement with the study cohort and community prior to undertaking this study and throughout the time I prepared for it provided me invaluable perspective. Over many years I have gained considerable understanding and insight into the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the participants. Whereas having long personal experience which strongly parallels that of the participants also imparts sympathy and comprehension, being nonetheless of a distinct cultural and linguistic background myself offers some safeguard from the danger of overrapport. An extended discussion of my

background and consequent issues related to my engagement with the study population can be found in the section headed “The Role(s) of the Researcher” above.

As an additional means of supporting trustworthiness, member checking was undertaken in the form of sending to each participant the transcript of his or her interview and inviting them to clarify, extend, or retract what they said. (Participants were informed of this in writing before the initial interview; see “Appendix E: Informed Consent Form.”)

Finally, to seek feedback on the inquiry in progress, on my field notes and emerging perspectives or hypotheses, as well as to review and comment upon my field notes and analysis procedures, I engaged the service of a colleague who is a specialist in qualitative research methods to provide peer review and debriefing. Her review of the procedures and databases constructed during analysis of the narrative data resulted in recommendations regarding the process of theme-making and maintenance of the audit trail, which were incorporated in the final research design.

Transferability, Extrapolation, and Applicability

In support of earlier researchers’ assertions that conventional notions of generalizability are inappropriate for establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiries (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990), Janesick (2003) posits that “for those of us who are interested in questions of meaning and interpretation in individual cases – the kind of research done in education [...] – conventional thinking about generalizability falls short” (p. 70). After stating that “external generalizability is often not a crucial issue for qualitative studies,” Maxwell (1996) adds the caveat: “This

does not mean that qualitative studies are never generalizable beyond the setting or informants studied” (p. 97). Maxwell (1996) observes that the qualitative researcher – especially in a study employing an open-ended interview protocol – does not seek to obtain large-scale, generalizable findings, but rather “to focus on the *particular* phenomenon studied [and] trade generalizability and comparability for internal validity and contextual understanding” (p. 64).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer the criteria of transferability as an alternative to generalizability, with the understanding that “if there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere” and that such application is valid only in the case of “contextual similarity” which only the applier can know (p. 298). Lincoln and Guba conclude: “The responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible” (p. 298).

Patton (1990) is less anxious to reject the conventional notion of generalization, but states that qualitative researchers studying human activity must pursue “more limited generalizations” with the understanding that “problems emerge within particular time and space boundaries”; nonetheless, the rigorous qualitative study “permits the researcher to seek patterns that cut across programs or policies in a number of different places and for a number of different groups” (p. 156). However, Patton also cites researchers such as Cronbach (1975) and Stake (1978) who have cautioned that social phenomena are too context-specific and variable to permit generalization. In light of this, Patton offers a concept similar to transferability but in this case termed “extrapolation” as an alternative

to generalization, defined as “modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful and problem oriented rather than statistical and probabilistic” (p. 489). Patton echoes Lincoln and Guba’s call for “sufficient descriptive data” with an admonition that researchers seeking to make valid extrapolations must build upon “information-rich samples and designs” (p. 489).

Mason (1996) offers further useful counsel to qualitative researchers seeking to assert some degree of applicability of their finding beyond the immediate cases and conditions of the study, involving the claim of “no reason to suspect atypicality” of the data or analysis thereof (p. 153). Mason explains that although researchers should “not attempt to make empirical generalizations,” it is also true that where due rigor has been applied to sampling, data collection, and data interpretation, researchers “have no reason to assume that [their] sample and therefore [their] analysis are atypical” (p. 153). Nonetheless, Mason cautions that researchers should avoid viewing this non-atypicality claim as “the only basis on which [they] can argue that [their] research has wider resonance” (p. 153), and offers further suggestions for establishing broader applicability such as exploring the question of “lessons for other settings” and making “strategic comparisons” (p. 155), notions which align closely with Patton’s (1990) concept of “extrapolation” and Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) “transferability,” respectively. Lincoln and Guba assert that to ensure transferability the qualitative researcher is “responsible for providing the widest possible range of information for inclusion in the thick description” (p. 316). As evidenced by the literature review presented in Chapter Two, a design

feature of this study is to allow for a maximally broad range of possibility in the findings; no external limitations are placed on the scope or focus of participants' responses.

As described under the heading of "Sampling Techniques" in this chapter, the findings of the present study are based on data collected from a sample of participants purposefully selected on the basis of rather narrowly defined criteria. Glesne (1999) points out that the intent of using a "homogeneous sampling" of similar cases is to enable collection of data with enough depth and richness to support meaningful analysis (p. 29), while Lincoln and Guba (1985) stipulate flatly that the qualitative researcher "will wish to engage in purposeful sampling" in the interest of transferability (p. 316). Although this study does not encompass a sample large enough to argue for generalizability, the population is defined and its parameters delineated sufficiently to enable readers to determine the sample's similarity and applicability (transferability) to other cases, contexts, and circumstances.

Finally, the report of the inquiry includes discussion of "lessons for other settings" (or recommendations) as warranted in Chapter Nine, which together with the provision of rich and detailed descriptive data, and clear explanations of the procedures and contexts of the study and analysis – "to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgments possible" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316) – and which will enable those who might wish to make use of the findings of the inquiry to accurately determine its appropriateness to their purposes.

Dependability and Confirmability

In conventional quantitative research, the validity of a study depend greatly on whether its data and findings could be duplicated and confirmed; that is, a study utilizing substantially identical methods under substantially identical conditions on substantially identical “study units” should yield substantially identical outcomes. This requirement emphasizes the employment of consistently reliable instruments and measures. In qualitative research, it is often infeasible or impossible to duplicate the conditions and contexts of a study, and as such researchers have proposed study designs which include triangulation activities within a single inquiry such as the use of different methods or multiple researchers (e.g., Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966). However, these approaches have also been seen as inadequate and inappropriate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the use of multiple researchers, for example, while perhaps feasible in some cases, can be “very cumbersome” and might in fact “utterly destroy the condition of independent inquiry” (p. 316), and propose as an alternative means of safeguarding the dependability of a study the establishment of “the inquiry audit, based metaphorically on the fiscal audit” (p. 317) in which the researcher strives to provide an unbroken “audit trail” of procedures and activities which can be examined by potential users of the inquiry findings. To further strengthen the audit trail, qualified peers may be asked to review data and analysis, a process referred to as *external audit*. This person’s notes, together with interview protocols and guides, interview transcripts, analytical memos, and other materials, are made available to ensure the transparency of the research process.

Another major issue related to dependability and confirmability – with roots in the

these criteria's conventional antecedents of consistency and neutrality – is that of instrumentation. Particularly in the case of narrative or interview-elicited data, the notion of instrumentation has been seen to require significant reconsideration over traditional or quantitative notions. Discussing the challenges of supporting the dependability of human instrumentation, Maxwell (1996) describes how researchers can tend (even unwittingly) to make data fit preconceived theories or preconceptions, and advises that “the goal of a qualitative study is not to eliminate [potential bias] but to understand it and use it productively” (p. 91). Indeed, Lincoln and Guba (1985) “concede what might be called ‘instrumental’ unreliability” (p. 299), allowing that unlike inanimate instruments such as micrometers or surveys, human interviewers and observers can suffer fatigue, make mistakes, and be biased. However, these limitations are far offset by the advantages of the human instrument, which is, indeed, the only one capable of the task. Seidman (2006) describes the research interviewer as an “adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact, and understanding” (p. 23), while Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that “the human instrument can duplicate virtually any other instrument people have devised” (p. 107). That said, even within a design meant to permit the broadest possible range of responses, researchers usually employ either standardized question protocols or interview guides in order “to minimize interviewer effects” (Patton, 1990, p. 285).

The concept of confirmability, or perhaps more accurately of confirmation, has particular implications in narrative research. The objective of confirming interview data is to verify the intent of participants and support whatever claims are made regarding the interpretation of data, not to prove the veracity of the experiences described therein. The

notion of verifying the truthfulness of statements made by subjects in narrative interviews, by means of seeking confirmation from other sources (e.g., teachers, advisors, documents), has been widely disputed and even rejected (Campbell, 1988; Donmoyer, 1990; Putnam, 1990; Wolcott, 1995). Titon (1980) argues that in analyzing data from autobiographical narratives, “proof is not an issue [...]. What is at issue is a human being recollecting, in a state of vivid sensation, a critical moment in his life, and to a degree re-experiencing it by means of storytelling” (p. 280). Borland (1990) discusses the question of what “proof” might entail when the nature of narrative research – in that it asks subjects to relate their perceptions of experienced phenomena – unavoidably involves meaning in flux: Autobiographers may revise their “sense of self” through the process of telling their stories, with the result that the “narratives will also change” (p. 63). Charmaz (2001) observes that “an interview may capture a participant’s views and preferred self-presentation at one point in time. Both can change” (p. 682).

In the present study, in addition to maintaining a standard audit trail, as described above, I engaged the service of a qualified colleague to provide external auditing and feedback at various points during the processed of data collection, analysis, and write-up; this outside perspective was valuable in helping me to judge whether and to what degree those processes might be affected by bias or preconceptions, and provided a means for me to evaluate my effectiveness as an interview instrument. I strove to be ever mindful of “instrumental” limitations or distortions, cognizant that “meaning is, to some degree, a function of the participant’s interaction with the interviewer. Only by recognizing that interaction and affirming its possibilities can interviewers use their skills to minimize the

distortion” (Seidman, 2006, p. 23). Questions of my background, frames of reference and potential issues of bias or preconceptions which might bear upon my instrumental reliability are addressed in “The Role(s) of the Researcher” above.

Limitations of the Study

First, for reasons of exigency and convenience, the study was limited in terms of geography and affiliation: Most of the participants live or have lived in the communities described in Chapter One and are or were students at the institution called GCC herein (though many had also spent time at other colleges or universities, and some had already transferred). Though one may take comfort in Flick’s (2002) contention that all “knowledge and practice are studied as *local* knowledge and practice” (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 11), one must also duly note that any lessons derived from this study would be more persuasive if they could be corroborated with data from mid-childhood immigrant students in other places. It is hoped that future inquiry of a similar sort might be expanded to include other relevant sites. This project can be seen as a first step in a larger-scale and longer-term program of research on the underexplored question of mid-childhood immigrants in higher education.

As has been discussed above, the single most significant trustworthiness issue to be constantly aware of in conducting field research is the tendency for a participant-observer to be biased or to take up the enterprise with predetermined ideas about the dynamics at work in the research setting. Though significant, this pitfall is not at all uncommon in qualitative research, and is arguably surmountable to a satisfactory extent if anticipated, recognized, and taken into account. What is required is constant vigilance

and self-checking to ensure that the highest possible degree of impartiality obtains.

In addition, the design was limited in regard to the number of participants whose input I was able to elicit in a substantial way. This is of course a common condition of in-depth qualitative inquiries conducted by a single researcher; regarding interview-based methods, Bell (2002) noted that “the time commitment required makes it unsuitable for work with a large number of participants” (p. 210). The objective of the qualitative researcher is to obtain a deeper and richer perspective (or “thicker description”) from a relatively small sample, one which is not necessarily representative in the quantitative sense. This makes it even more important for the researcher to carefully select appropriate and well-informed participants.

Finally, as this researcher learned while conducting a course-related interview-based study on international student perceptions of personal safety in the U.S. during the fall of 2001, research projects can be strongly affected by contemporary events. Whether local or on a larger stage, as long as such developments are relatively minor, data are unlikely to be unduly influenced. The recruitment and interviewing of participants for this study occurred during the spring of 2009, a time of considerable upheaval in global economies following the financial meltdown of late 2008. The effects of this context on the data seemed limited, though certainly discussions of employment and finances reflected the darker tone of events.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

A total of 15 students participated in interviews during the spring semester of 2009. Though colleagues with related research experiences had cautioned me that student participants, especially in an urban commuter college, might prove difficult to locate and hold to a schedule, and though I was anticipating a struggle to identify candidates who met the criteria (as these are members of a hidden population [Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004]), this part of the project in fact proceeded quite smoothly. Within a few weeks of publicizing my study, I had been contacted by fifteen suitable candidates, all of whom showed up for interviews promptly and shared their stories without undue reservation.¹²

Under the heading “The Role(s) of the Researcher/Interviewer” in the previous chapter, an extensive discussion of issues related to my role is offered, including a description of my experiences as a mid-childhood migrant and as a foreign resident abroad, my experience acquiring Spanish as a second language, and my long connection with U.S. Latino cultures and those of three Latin American countries (Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba). This is accompanied by an account of why and in what ways those circumstances were brought to bear during the study. Here I will present further details of how the interviewing process transpired.

¹² Possible exceptions to this are discussed further below.

Before beginning each interview, I took a few moments to explain the concept of “generation 1.5” (which in spite of being members of this cohort, none of the participants had heard about prior to hearing it from me), to describe my own experience as a mid-childhood newcomer, and to explain how my interest in the study topic arose in part from this experience. I explained further how my thinking on this topic was informed by my experiences living as a foreigner abroad, as a university student in Mexico and as a teacher in Colombia and Japan. Typically participants showed an interest in this information, and we chatted briefly about it.

This strategy seemed to achieve the desired effects of putting participants at ease and establishing a sense of shared experience between us; an illustration of this came at the end of the interview with Daniel, when I thanked him for taking the time to talk with me. He responded (as did other interviewees), by thanking me in return, adding that he had found the interview very helpful, and that he was surprised and happy that someone had taken an interest in students like him. In reference to my experience with mid-childhood migration, he commented, “You understand my pain!” In some cases, participants stated that being given an opportunity to recount their life’s experiences was a positive and even therapeutic experience. Replying to an email I sent thanking her for the interview, Veronica wrote: “Telling my story made me feel much better.”

Nonetheless, it must be observed that there exists the possibility that to some extent participants’ responses were colored by certain unavoidable circumstances of the interview and characteristics of the interviewer. For example, participants were invited to talk about how their school teachers treated them and about teachers’ attitudes. With a

few notable exceptions, interviewees reported positive experiences, which might be in part attributed to their speaking in deference to me as a teacher. On the other hand, their responses aligned with a very recent study in which Latino young adults reported preponderantly favorable views of their teachers (Lopez, 2009).

My non-Latino background may also have influenced participant responses. Few reported significant negative experiences of prejudice or racism, for example, which could have been affected by a desire to not offend a White interlocutor. In addition, my racial identity could have affected which potentially qualified candidates actually volunteered to participate, a possibility raised explicitly by one participant:

It's always about race. My Hispanic friends are like, "Oh yeah, what's his name?" "Mark." And they're like, "Is he White?" And it's like, "Yes." Like, "Oh." You know, it's like, oh, the race changes everything. But if you tell them like, "Oh no, he's Hispanic," they're like, "Oh, OK, we'll go." (Xochitl)

It should be noted that this quote is excerpted from this participant's rather extensive critique of the attitudes and behaviors of her peers, and as such its rhetorical purpose may to some degree have been driving its descriptive one. Aside from this commentary, unique in the dataset, no evidence of qualified candidates avoiding the interview for any reason could be discerned; indeed, as noted above, participants came forward with surprising dispatch and enthusiasm.

Language may also have played a role in how participants responded. At the start of the interview process, participants were informed, using both English and Spanish, that they should feel free to use whichever language they preferred in telling their stories. Very little Spanish was used in the end, which might be attributed to reasons such as the participants' desire to put to use a language they had spent difficult years learning, a

belief that the use of English was more appropriate in the college setting, a perception that this non-native Spanish-speaking researcher might not fully understand otherwise, or simply a desire to be “polite” and use the interviewer’s dominant language. In several cases, participants expressed reservations about their Spanish skills. Whatever the reasons, only one participant chose to use a significant amount of Spanish in the interview.

Finally, some participants might have been constrained from speaking freely for reasons related to their lack of legal immigration status. That some of the candidates would be in this circumstance was perhaps to be expected; however, their number – more than half of the participants – was a surprise. Clearly a strong incentive exists to avoid talking about legally sensitive issues with unknown individuals, since doing so can incur risk. Nonetheless, in all but two cases, the participants were quite forthcoming (even startlingly so) in their willingness to discuss the effects of what is an inescapable and fundamental condition of their lives, their legal status, and their strategies for dealing with this status. As a researcher I was struck by the trust placed in me, and highly cognizant of the obligation this entailed as well. (A discussion of measures taken to mask participants’ identities is presented later in this chapter.)

Overview of Study Participants

In this section, the study sample will be described in regard to salient features, including rough characterizations of the kind and occurrence of these features among the participants. As this is a qualitative study with a small and focused sample, precise distributions would have no generalizable or statistical value (Glesne, 1999) and in any

event such studies are not concerned with “objectively verifiable” data of this type (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998); hence, this sort of analysis is not offered. All of the characteristics mentioned here and the findings pertaining to them are presented and discussed more fully in the succeeding chapters.

The study sample represented a broad range within the stipulated criteria for participation, regarding in particular age on arrival and the length of residence in the U.S. The sample also represented a broad spectrum related to characteristics such as transnational experience, parental education level, SES, legal status, and language proficiency.

Ten women and five men were interviewed, a gender imbalance which though somewhat more exaggerated reflects national trends, wherein women are seen to strongly outnumber men in U.S. postsecondary enrollments (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009), and to an even greater degree at community colleges (Provasnik & Planty, 2008).

The ages of participants on arrival represented the full range from the youngest to oldest allowable to be considered “generation 1.5” (as discussed and defined in the preceding chapters). Four participants arrived at the age of eight, three at nine, one at ten, three at eleven, one each at thirteen, fourteen and fifteen, and one at sixteen. This sample skews toward the younger, with eight of fifteen participants between the ages of eight and ten on arrival, and seven between eleven and sixteen.

English language proficiency varied widely, from native-like superior in a few cases to somewhat limited and marked by syntactic and semantic inaccuracy in others. In general, however, the participants expressed strong confidence in their English skills

while demonstrating proficiency levels which in all cases were fully adequate to the interview task.

Fourteen of the 15 participants were from Mexico, with the other coming from Honduras, a distribution which roughly reflects the population of the community. (Though Mexicans do not make up such a high percentage of Latinos in the community, a significant portion of that population are Puerto Rican, and so by definition are not immigrants.) Reflecting what Sullivan (2000) termed the “myth” that Hispanics are a mainly rural people, nearly all participants hailed from urban areas, mostly from larger cities such as Mexico City, or major regional capitals, while only one came from a smaller town, and none came from rural areas.

All participants were able to identify various individuals who served as cultural informants during their initial adaptation processes, and these ranged from friends and classmates to siblings (in some cases, family members immigrated across spans of years) to teachers and school staff members. Nearly all mentioned sports and other extracurricular activities, especially during high school, as playing an important role in their process of adapting and acculturating to the new setting.

All participants were current community college students or former community college students who had transferred to university. As the study criteria required a semester of completed transferable coursework, all participants had completed at least that amount of college, while some were well along the path to completing a baccalaureate degree. A handful of participants had studied in other colleges before coming to GCC. As goal-setting and prior intent to study has been seen as a strong

predictor of postsecondary persistence (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000), participants were asked when they first thought seriously about going to college. Two-thirds reported that this occurred early in life, during elementary school or earlier, while the others did not begin thinking about college until high school. Interestingly, the age of earliest reported college plans showed no correlation with parental education; children whose parents had not completed elementary school were thinking about professional careers in early childhood, while others with university-educated parents reached high school without considering further education.

Approximate family economic level in the country of origin was possible to discern on the basis of descriptions of living conditions. Contrary to the popular image of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, family economic status and living conditions prior to immigration were not generally described as dire, but rather to range from moderately struggling to simply moderate. In only one case did a participant describe what might be termed real poverty, while in some others the families seemed to enjoy relatively comfortable circumstances. In several cases, participants mentioned that their families owned homes (in some cases more than one) in the country of origin, and in roughly half, their parents had completed some amount of postsecondary education. The impetus behind migration was in nearly all cases not to escape grinding hardship but rather to improve prospects, especially for the children. In most cases, the circumstances of the family immediately after arrival in the U.S. were considerably more straitened than in the country of origin, in some instances extremely so, though conditions typically had improved markedly during the years since arrival.

All participants reported having relatives already present in the U.S. when they arrived. Though these were in some cases members of the immediate family, most commonly relatives such as aunts, uncles, and cousins preceded the newcomers. These contacts were described as providing valuable assistance to the newly arrived immigrants, including material assistance (e.g., housing, employment) as well as advice and information.

Transnational experience was common in nearly half of the cases, taking three forms: (a) regular visits to the country of origin; (b) immigration, repatriation, and re-immigration during childhood; and (c) the choice to return to the country of origin in young adulthood for extended periods. In other cases, travel to the country of origin was difficult or impossible due to legal status.

A primary concern of immigrants is the legal status of their residence. Though questions regarding immigration status were explicitly absent from the interview protocol for reasons of privacy, several participants volunteered that they either lacked legal status or that this was unsettled. Status remained unspecified in other cases. In one, the participant spent her late childhood and early adulthood as an undocumented immigrant, and only recently gained legal status. Another maintained legal status during the first several years of residence here (holding a visitor's visa which required annual returns to the country of origin), though this participant did not specify whether this status was current, except to mention that the trips abroad had ceased in the past couple of years. In at least one additional case, the participant pointedly avoided discussion of this issue, though other indicators (e.g., inability to travel abroad, inability to access financial aid)

would strongly suggest a lack of legal status. As stated previously, I did not introduce this topic in interviews, and when participants chose to raise it, I was careful to let them set the parameters of the discussion.

A Note on Masking Participant Identity

In all cases participants are given pseudonyms herein and obvious identifying details are masked; however, in the case of those who disclosed that their status is undocumented, I have taken particular pains to conceal their identities. This has raised issues with regard to the level of detail about their lives and activities. Given that the community in which the study was conducted is somewhat insular (like many communities, regardless of their composition or the size of the metropolitan area in which they are found) and the college itself is of modest size, there exists the possibility of interested parties using this document as a means of attempting to identify individuals, an endeavor for which it is hard to imagine a benign purpose beyond idle curiosity. On the other hand, none of those who lacked documentation claimed to be greatly afraid of being prosecuted for their status (whether this lack of fear was real, and whether it is prudent, are separate questions), and it should be noted that within immigrant gateway communities it is not uncommon for undocumented individuals to appear openly at public meetings and demonstrations intended to draw attention to their cause. Regardless of the degree of concern the participants themselves might have, however, the study was designed to stringently safeguard privacy. To this end, in addition to the use of pseudonyms and other common masking devices (omitting names of family members, teachers, schools, etc.), in the cases of participants identified as lacking legal status I have

chosen to mask or omit specific details and characteristics. In some cases, I refer to characteristics, events, or activities reported in the interview data without specifying the individual in question. The well-being of those who volunteered to participate takes priority over the demands of the study; however, I do not believe that any changes or omissions thus made are significantly deleterious to the study.

A Note on Punctuating Narrative Quotations

Spoken ellipsis versus edited ellipsis. Ellipsis (...) is used in quoted material from interviews to indicate when a speaker's voice trails off (often after "so" or "well"), a rhetorical move often used to indicate that there is more to a story than the speaker cares to specify. In other cases, this trailing off may be simply a pause which allows the speaker to collect her thoughts. In either event, the standard three-dot ellipsis is used herein to indicate a trailing off or pause in spoken discourse. In cases where I have excised material from a longer quotation for the sake of brevity or relevance, ellipsis within square brackets is used.

Use of quotation marks with quasi-direct or unsignalled quotations. A common tactic in spoken narrative is the use of quasi-direct quotation, usually indicated these days with the word "like." Participants in this study made ample use of this ingenious linguistic device, which permits the speaker to recount either direct (word-for-word) or indirect quotations. However, this habit also presents a challenge for transcription, as the distinction between direct and indirect quotes can be unclear. In the transcribed material presented in this document, an attempt is made to distinguish between quotes which seem to be verbatim and those which seem reported indirectly, with standard quotation mark

punctuation used in the former and not in the latter. For example:

I'm like, "Well, I'm going to a community college," and they're like, "But why? But why?" You know, I don't qualify for financial aid. And they wouldn't understand that. So I'm just like, OK, just keep it to myself. (Xochitl)

The clause following the final "like" is apparently not a direct quote, and as such is left alone, whereas the clauses following the other instances of "like" are clearly verbatim reported speech and as such are enclosed in quotation marks.

Participant Profiles

In the following profiles, with the exception of brief commentary which is clearly the researcher's impression (e.g., "Susan is an energetic and forceful speaker"), all descriptions of participants' actions, feelings, and attitudes, as well as the circumstances and events of their lives, are taken from their statements in research interviews. As an ongoing reminder of the source of the information, I have in many instances prefaced material with phrases such as "Susan described..." or "Susan explained..."; however, this becomes cumbersome when applied too persistently, so in many places it is left as understood.

For lack of a better organizing principle, the profiles are presented in order of the individuals' arrival in the U.S., from youngest to oldest. When more than one participant arrived at the same age, they are ordered alphabetically.

Carmen

Carmen is a thoughtful, almost scholarly young woman who expresses pride and confidence in her academic skills. She came to the U.S. at the age of eight from a smaller city in Mexico, where her family lived in fairly comfortable circumstances and she

attended private schools. She described how much her parents gave up to move her family to the U.S., and the burden that places on her:

They sacrificed it all: Their family, their friends, their life. So I think that ultimately it's made me more aware of the actions that I take today and the effect that they have on my parents. I feel like I have to, maybe not live out their expectations, but work really hard to make something of myself so that their sacrifices weren't in vain. It's kind of a big pressure.

A strong influence on Carmen has been her mother, whom she admires not only for her sacrifices but for the transformation she went through after coming to the U.S. – she went to school, learned English, and found decent employment. In vivid contrast, she described how her father “crumbled” in the face of his diminished status and prospects in this country, and ultimately returned to Mexico.

Like many successful students, Carmen has demonstrated an aptitude for making connections and decisions which would prove academically fruitful: Her high school principal became a close family friend, she became involved in after-school tutoring and enrolled in advanced placement courses, she entered a college bridge program and actively sought advice about her academic prospects. Her family moved away from the city enclave neighborhood where she spent her later childhood, and though she spoke fondly of this community she also expressed a sense of how it might limit her, saying that she did not “want to get stuck there” as, in her view, some friends had.

Francisco

Francisco is young man with an amiable but serious and even scholarly demeanor. Although his parents had for economic reasons been unable to finish their own studies, he described himself as being focused on educational goals even at an early age:

When I was a little kid, I would rather play school with my mother than play with cars or toys. So when I started kindergarten, I already knew how to read, how to write, and how to add and subtract. So by first grade I was more advanced.

Francisco's family arrived in the U.S. when he was eight years old, ostensibly for a brief summertime visit. Their plans soon changed, however: "At the end of the summer all four of us were gonna go back to our lives, but my parents actually saw there was a better life here, more opportunities... so we kinda just never went back."

As a result of this, Francisco must now deal with the burden of being undocumented, which as a college student means he is not eligible for financial aid. This is particularly distressing to him since he excelled academically in high school and is well aware that he would have been able to gain admission in a competitive university where, given his family income, he could have qualified for tuition benefits. He perceives his situation as unjust, though he also recognizes the complexity of it:

Myself and my sister, we didn't really have a say in whether we wanted to stay here or not, and I mean we're really not at fault for the decision that my parents made, even though in my eyes it's a good one, even though it is kind of breaking the law. So there has to be a solution for people in that category.

In spite of his status and the challenges that this presents, Francisco maintains an upbeat attitude and expresses a sense of connection with this country. "I would say I'm more American now than Mexican," he stated, then added, "I mean, I'm still proud of being Mexican."

Xochitl

Xochitl speaks with the cadences of a typical Midwestern high school student; nothing in her conversation or demeanor would suggest that she was not born and raised in the region where she now lives. In fact, she spent her early years in Mexico City,

where during most of her childhood her father was absent, living and working in the U.S. Her mother finally persuaded him that the family should be reunited, and when Xochitl was eight years old, she and her mother and a sibling joined their father in the north.

By the end of middle school in the U.S., Xochitl had distinguished herself as an outstanding student, and a school counselor advised her to apply to magnet high schools. She was accepted at one, in a neighborhood far from her home and the ethnic enclave community she had grown accustomed to. At first this change was a shock – another period of adjustment she likened to that of when she had first arrived in the U.S. But she soon adapted and came to thrive in the new school.

In her fourth year of high school, she came to a discouraging realization: She lacked legal documentation (her visitor visa long expired) and as such would not qualify for student loans and grants for university. Keeping her status secret from even her closest friends, Xochitl chose not to give up in her education plans, and put her efforts into her GCC classes while exploring transfer possibilities, meeting with advisers in universities and trying to obtain funding that did not require a “social” (shorthand for “social security number,” or legal documentation). At the time of the interview she remained hopeful about her possibilities. Regarding her legal status, she stated that she felt that it strongly motivated her:

Being undocumented has definitely inspired me to keep going and going, you know, to not stop and to.... I don't know. It's hard to explain, it's just something you feel, the will to do something.

(More of Xochitl's story, in her own words, can be found later in this chapter.)

Marta

Marta might be described as a dream student: bright, eager, and thoughtful. She was unique among the participants in this study in that she had significant childhood back-and-forth or transnational experience. After her initial arrival in the U.S. at the age of eight, she adapted readily to her new setting:

Even though it was hard for me to adapt, I was doing very well. Maybe as a child, they learn everything as they go, and it was easy for me to learn the language. And within a year I was already an honor roll student, and student of the month, and getting all these awards for school.

This happy time was not to last; a few years later her parents decided to return to Mexico. Once again she went through a difficult adaptation process, and once again no sooner had she settled in to her new circumstances, at the age of thirteen, than her parents decided to move back to the U.S. Whereas most of the participants had to adapt only once to new surroundings – an experience universally described as difficult and disorienting – Marta had to undergo this process three times. In addition, after they were back in the U.S., her father spoke often about returning to Mexico, affecting Marta's attitude at school:

My dad was planning on taking us back to Mexico, so I kind of felt, why try, if I'm not gonna get anywhere? I felt like I wasn't gonna go anywhere. We ended up not leaving, but he would hint at it a lot. And I think that affected my grades, because I didn't try, I didn't do homework, I did really bad on tests.

During this time, her unsettled immigration status added to her sense that her options were limited. With encouragement from a sympathetic teacher, she eventually got involved in service clubs and changed her attitude about school. However, she remained convinced that there was little point to pursuing more education without documentation,

and after graduating, she worked for two years before deciding to go back to college. She was finally able to regularize her legal status, and began studying at GCC in preparation for transfer to university, where she planned to obtain a teaching degree.

Ellen

Ellen speaks carefully and deliberately, pausing often to consider her statements. Like many mid-childhood immigrants, her experience of arriving in a new country involved separating from members of her immediate family and joining other relatives; in her case, upon her arrival she lived with an aunt.

Although she came to the U.S. at the fairly early age of nine, her English – though fluent – is strongly accented and marked by occasional nonnative usage. How this came to be is a topic on which she had a good deal to say: She expressed her belief that she was badly served by being placed into classes from fourth through seventh grades which, though termed “bilingual,” were taught by teachers from abroad who spoke very limited English and did little to enable their students to learn it. She wished her parents had moved to a place with fewer people from Mexico, such as the town in another state where her cousins learned English within a year of coming to the U.S. She is aware also of her own complicity in her avoidance of English, as well as the enclave community effect:

I never put that much motivation to learn English, since everyone speaks Spanish in this community. Like if I go to the doctor’s, there will be someone speaking Spanish. If I go to a store.... And with my friends, they speak Spanish, so....

After her parents prevailed over the protests of school officials, she was placed into an all-English class in eighth grade, where she had her first “White teacher” and finally began learning English. This has been a long process, one which is not supported

by her well established Spanish-speaking social circle. In regard to being interviewed, she said, “I think that this is the biggest conversation I have had in English. For almost ten years.”

Veronica

A compact and forceful presence, Veronica embodies the “born storyteller.” From the start of the interview it was clear that she had a tale to tell and it would get told. The transcript of her interview is remarkable for the lack of interviewer interjections; she needed little prodding to provide rich and extensive details about her experiences.

Veronica spent her early years in the environs of Mexico City, and described a childhood defined by instability, poverty, and violence. She spoke candidly about her home life:

It was a lot of domestic violence we went through, a lot, a lot, a lot.... We wouldn't even have sometimes something to eat. Cornflakes, was like a major thing, like it was “Oh, you got cornflakes?” It's only gonna be once in your life, or once in a year.

When she was nine years old, she traveled with her parents and younger sister to the U.S. border. After enduring extreme hardships and one failed crossing attempt (a full version of Veronica's border-crossing story can be found later in this chapter), the family entered the U.S. and joined relatives who helped them get established. As her parents worked long hours, she had to balance her schoolwork with the role of surrogate parent to her younger siblings.

As a high school senior, she chose a path unique in her extended family: She began planning for college. With classmates, she explored options, visited campuses, and decided on a university in a city an hour's drive from home. After picking classes and

signing up for a dormitory with a high school friend, however, Veronica's American college girl fantasy fell to earth: The bills came, and as an undocumented immigrant, she did not qualify for funding. Having no experience in higher education and no one near her to offer informed guidance, she had underestimated the expenses, and simply could not afford it. Her university days ended before they began, and she returned home and enrolled in the local community college. At the time of the interview she was looking ahead to completing her two-year degree and transferring to university. She did not know how she would pay for it, but expressed determination to see it through.

Lidia

In a variation on the common story of a family waiting in the old country while their father/husband worked abroad, in Lidia's family it was her mother who went to the U.S. and sent money home. Lidia and her sister lived with their father and grandmother in Honduras. She credits her unschooled grandmother with giving her the skills she needed to become a successful student, relating fond memories of sitting with her sister every afternoon to do their homework:

We used to do it in the kitchen table, with my grandma watching us, till it was finished. It was a routine. My grandma doesn't know how to read and write, yet we always had our homework done neatly, cause she would always say, "I don't know how to read, I don't know how to write, I don't know what you put in there, but I know if something looks good or not!"

At the age of nine Lidia went with her sister to the U.S., to live with their mother and older siblings for the first time in their memories. She described how this came about, with her father unwilling to move to the U.S. and rejecting her mother's request to send the girls to her. Lidia's grandmother finally intervened, convincing her son to allow

the girls to go to a place where they would have a better future. The reality of this did not sink in to Lidia until the day the girls found out that their U.S. visas had been approved:

They said yes to us, and then I remember my grandma saying she had to go to the bathroom. And she came out of the bathroom and her eyes were red. But she kept on smiling. There was no tears, but her eyes were red. I guess that's when it hit me, like "I'm leaving." You know 'cause before that I was just excited to go with mommy, but after that I was like "Oh my god, I'm leaving and they're sad, they're sad because we're going."

Lidia has only seen her grandmother for brief visits since immigrating, but her legacy continues: Lidia credits the habits ingrained at her grandma's kitchen table with enabling her and her younger sister to avoid the path taken by their older siblings (who she described as "getting in trouble"). She completed a vocational program in a proprietary college and then enrolled in GCC with plans to pursue a career in the field of health services.

Roxana

Roxana is a slight and animated young woman with a talent for organizing, as she demonstrated from our first meeting: After we reviewed the criteria for inclusion in this study, she stopped me and said, "Wait a minute," and hurried away. Five minutes later, she returned with two former classmates, students who also met the study criteria and were willing to participate in interviews.

Roxana has lived exactly half of her twenty years in the U.S., having arrived from Mexico at the age of ten. As was the case with several participants, Roxana's family did not (to her knowledge) initially intend to stay in the U.S. They had relatives here and came during the summer months for "just a vacation." However, her mother was

involved in a serious accident and, being pregnant, was advised not to travel. The family stayed and the children started school, an idea that Roxana – missing her friends and her life back home – strongly resisted. In school, she initially felt lonely and lacking self-confidence, but was happily surprised to discover that many people in her new community and school spoke Spanish: “And that’s when I kind of feel like Well OK, I’m not the only one, and that gave me hope to keep going.”

Roxana would like to go back to Mexico for a visit, but sees this as impossible at the present. Having stayed beyond the term allowed on her visitor visa, she now lacks documentation. Thus, a decade after leaving her home in Mexico for a short “vacation,” Roxana described feeling disconnected from her old life with her extended family:

When I was over there I used to have my mom’s mom and dad, and both my dad’s [parents] too. Then when I was here my grandma passed away and then exactly a month [later] my dad’s father passed away. And then I think like three years my mom’s dad passed away. So now I only have one grandmother there, in Mexico, which is my dad’s mom.

As she does not qualify for most sources of school funding, Roxana had almost abandoned her plans to attend college until she learned that certain avenues were available which did not have documentation requirements. After her first year at GCC, she thought seriously about returning to Mexico to attend university there, but ultimately decided to stay for two reasons: She was worried that her academic Spanish skills would not be adequate, and she came to the realization that leaving the U.S. would separate her from her family for an unknown period of time; without legal status, coming back would be extremely difficult.

Andres

Andres and his twin brother Gerardo immigrated to the U.S. when they were eleven years old. (The closeness of the two brothers is evident in the fact that both tend to use the adjective “we” far more often than “I” in describing their experiences.) Their childhood years were marked by a good amount of moving around in central Mexico, mostly in and around Mexico City, due to their father’s work. By early adolescence, having transferred to a new school, the boys began to have academic problems, which Andres explained:

We’d get in trouble and sometimes get in fights. We didn’t know the kids, we didn’t know anyone, so it’s kind of hard because usually by that time [the equivalent of U.S. 5th grade] people know each other, they come from the same elementary school and all that.

The boys’ troubles at school, Andres reported, contributed to his family’s decision to emigrate. On arriving in the U.S., Andres was placed into ESL classes, where he remained for two years (7th and 8th grades), an experience he described as mostly alienating:

We were in a segregated group from the school. We felt like, that we didn’t interact with pretty much all the other students.

Andres was one of a handful of participants who had extended transnational experience. After graduating from high school, he and his brother moved back to Mexico and entered a university there to study architecture. Although he felt that they were able to perform as required academically, they found more challenging the task of adapting to the country and culture of their origin. After a year, they returned to the U.S., where the two are now studying in a community college and are preparing for university transfer.

A final observation about Andres regards his storytelling style, which is remarkable in his ability to weave multiple threads of extended narrative in a single grammatical sentence – a linguistic marvel which presented significant challenges to analysis – as seen in this unedited example:

See we never really adapted completely to, um, in high school, I mean I think we did, at some point, we were playing sports and we were doing activities that helped us interact with other students and felt normal, yeah that's exactly the term, normal, but at the time we were like Oh, we really wanna go Mexico to have the full experience of having friends and having a good relation with other students, like more than, cause it was, I guess for us it was kind of hard speaking the language and I mean the interaction, the communication, I guess with friends, even though we knew the language but I guess we never really had the courage to speak and, I guess that kind of brings me back to the whole point of in seventh grade I wish I had been pushed more, but then when I was a senior in high school, we wanna have the full experience and like, Oh yeah, we should go back and do the architecture thing, and then like if possible come back here 'cause we, I mean we have lived here for eight years, now our whole family was here, some of our uncles also had immigrated recently, I mean in a period of three years like four families moved here, so the plan was then we were gonna come back and maybe get a master's here.

Gerardo

Gerardo is Andres's twin brother. Tall and athletic, he is rather reflective and analytical in his responses, and chooses his words carefully. In contrast to his brother's tendency toward free-association, Gerardo is more deliberate in his narrative style.

In broad outline and in many particulars, however, the twins' narratives are a match; as mentioned above, they both use the first-person plural pronoun when describing not only past events but also their feelings and perspectives.

Like many of the participants, Gerardo reported that when his family immigrated, his parents concealed their plans to remain in the U.S. for an extended time:

We didn't know what the whole situation would be, so we decided, yeah, sure, we'll go. But then after a couple of months, maybe close to a year, that's when they started talking about staying longer.... But all along they knew that, that was part of their plan.

The difference between visiting for a set period and staying indefinitely is of course enormous, particularly for an adolescent. Gerardo explained:

So initially I had told all of my friends that I would be coming back, just only after a year, that I would go to the same school as them. At the beginning I saw it as a quick learning experience. But not a whole life-changing experience.

Though other participants expressed this in different ways, Gerardo's words capture that which they all shared, the overriding and unavoidable effect of mid-childhood immigration: "a whole life-changing experience." Part of that experience Gerardo characterized as loss: "We felt like we had missed part of our teenage years, like a period of our life, from being here." This was the impetus behind their decision to return to Mexico to attend university, a project that was aborted some months later. Gerardo explained what happened:

We always thought, once we go back to Mexico everything is gonna be great, because all that cultural part that we were missing here. It's gonna be there, so.... We felt like we wanted that experience. But when we got that and spent a couple of months there, we didn't find that.

The brothers returned to the U.S. where Gerardo, together with his brother, is pursuing a degree path beginning in the community college but with eyes on the goal of transfer to a four-year institution.

Jose

Jose's demeanor is that of a self-assured young scholar, cerebral and ready to listen, but eager for a debate. Having arrived in the U.S. at the age of eleven, he exhibits

near-native proficiency in English; only a careful observer would identify him as an immigrant on the basis of his language use. His manner of speaking is deliberate and in the interview he used for the most part a kind of polished academic prose. An example is his description of the experience of living between two cultures as “kind of an existential void, [...] a vacuum,” followed by the caveat: “I wouldn’t call it a crisis, because I don’t care what people perceive me as.”

Like many immigrant children, Jose grew up in a mainly one-parent home, his father having gone to live in the U.S. beginning at the age of seventeen and returning to Mexico intermittently. His father was well versed in U.S. culture, which doubtless helped in the adaptation process once Jose and his mother came to the U.S.

When he arrived in the U.S. he was placed into ESL classes in middle school, which he felt was useful, but when he was compelled to take more ESL in high school, he took exception. School officials held their ground, and it was not until he engaged in a heated argument with the teacher that he managed to escape, and spent the remainder of the semester in study hall. However, he made his point the following semester, getting stellar grades in “regular” classes and being moved to advanced placement courses.

Jose’s life has involved some transnational movement: He was born in Mexico, lived in the U.S. for two years as an infant, and then returned to Mexico, where he stayed until age eleven. After graduating from high school in the U.S., Jose went to Mexico to play semi-professional soccer, a period he describes as “the best 6 months of my life.” Perhaps because of this experience, together with periodic visits to Mexico over the years, Jose gives the impression of being comfortably bicultural.

Jose has accomplished the highest level of education of all the participants. After two years of community college (where he reports he did not feel challenged), he transferred first to one university (which he disliked intensely) and then another, where at the time of the interview he was near completing a bachelor's degree.

Sara

Sara has the mien of a rather reserved young woman, one who is even perhaps a little bookish, but is at the same time quick to reveal a smart sense of humor and irony. One is not surprised to discover that she has been involved in competitive sports in both high school and college; she is long-limbed and athletic. In conversation she favors the succinct response, and is not given to lengthy narrative.

Sara came to the U.S. when she was twelve years old, the youngest of five siblings. Her memory of entering school in her new country was a sense of shock: She had attended parochial school in Mexico, and viewed the way that the children behaved and interacted in school in the U.S. to be startlingly rough. In school, she made a conscious effort to associate with the presumably gentler "nerds" and people with "different talents." She developed a love of reading and took her studies seriously, and believes that her involvement in sports was a valuable means of helping her fit in.

Although she had spent a third of her life in the U.S., Sara claimed little feeling of connection to this country. About her identity, she stated:

I'm a hundred percent Mexican. That's what I think. I was born there, I grew up there, I speak the language, my culture and everything. I still practice the same things. I've just like added more to my knowledge, I think, about the American culture. But I still do the things that we used to do in Mexico. Like celebrating certain days, my religion, and everything.

Within her family, Sara is an anomaly in regard to her dedication to school. Of her four older siblings and her parents, the only one to complete high school was her father. She felt that her parents were not able to understand why she spent so much time on school, an attitude which has caused some tension. Nonetheless, Sara related her intention to complete a bachelor's degree and then continue to graduate school. This plan could be complicated by Sara's lack of legal documentation; at the time of the interview she was engaged in exploring options for funding her continuing education.

Daniel

It is hard to avoid a word like "indomitable" in describing Daniel. An energetic and self-assured young man, he came with his family to the U.S. when he was thirteen years old and at the time he was interviewed, barely five years later, he was finishing his second semester at college, involved in college clubs and activities, and occupying an important student leadership position.

After planning to be a doctor from the time he was a small child, and after taking full loads of science and math classes in high school, Daniel had a realization when preparing an application for university: When asked to explain why he wanted to become a doctor, the only thing that came to mind was money. "So I was like, I need 500 words for this essay, and the only sentence I have is 'Because of the money'?" He came to recognize that what he really wanted to do was not medicine.

Central to Daniel's early experience in the U.S. was his decision to join the football team at his high school, which turned out to be a major challenge and source of some pride and encouragement: "It just showed me, if I didn't die here, I'm gonna keep

going. And that's what happened." A significant issue Daniel faces as he goes forward with his studies is his lack of legal documentation, a status which precludes his receiving financial aid and greatly complicates any effort to earn money.

Nadia

Nadia grew up in Mexico with her father a distant figure, living in the north and sending money home, coming for periodic visits. As in many families in such circumstances, Nadia's parents eventually came to decide that this lifestyle was unsustainable. When she was fourteen, her mother brought her to join her father in the U.S., a development that Nadia did not like:

I was really depressed, just crying, "Oh please mom, I don't like this, I don't wanna go to this school, I just wanna go back to my country. I don't like this, I wanna go back." Because I had my friends, and over here, I had nothing.

When she started school her mother insisted, against the advice of the school staff, that she be placed into classes with all English speakers. Nadia felt ostracized and out of place, and implemented a major campaign to change her mother's mind:

I didn't want to talk, I was like, Mom, "I need to go to bilingual, I just can't do it." I'm like, "No, no, no, it's either I get depressed and shy and I never talk, or you put me in bilingual."

Nonetheless, in the end she came away with a very critical view of bilingual education as she experienced it. "Maybe it's good to be there for like one year, just for you to catch the language," she says, "but once you know it, and you feel confident, just move on. Cause it's not good to stay in ESL, it puts you behind instead of going forward."

Nadia's way of describing her experiences is direct and succinct. Regarding her

initial experience in the U.S., she said, “I just wanted to fit in someplace, but I didn’t know how.” At the time of the interview, after having graduated from high school and completed her first year of college, she stated that she felt quite at home in the U.S. Tellingly, though, when referring to Mexico, she consistently said “my country.”

Ofelia

Of the participants in this study, Ofelia was the oldest student on arrival to the U.S.; she came at the age of sixteen and entered school as a high school freshman. She was enrolled in bilingual and ESL classes for all four years, a fact that she laments today as being counterproductive to her learning. Her family was very supportive to her during her high school years, prohibiting her from working so that she could put her energy into schoolwork, and even providing her with pocket money so that she would not need employment. However, this largess ended at the doors of higher education, where she was left to fend for herself financially.

After spending years as a shy high schooler, and another year at GCC just going to class, she finally met an advisor who shook up her world, told her to get involved in clubs, and held up some incentives for her (e.g., a trip to a conference on the West Coast). In addition, a friend who was already involved pushed her further. With these influences, she has, by her own account, been completely transformed, doing things that she says she would never have imagined. She has now become involved in not only attending workshops but speaking at them and organizing them; she has served as a panelist and spokesperson for her peer group in the media.

A practical young woman who pushes herself to go beyond the boundaries she

imagined for herself, Ofelia's characterization of her own identity reflects these traits; she described herself as "A Mexican girl, with a little bit of American girl too. Un poquito de americana, con sueños sin limitaciones. [A little bit American, with unlimited dreams.]"

Two Participant Narratives

The following two subsections present significant elements of the stories of Veronica and Xochitl, presented in their own words. Consistent with the life story method proposed by Atkinson (1996) as means of producing "a flowing narrative in the words of the person telling the story," these texts have been formatted by removing questions and interjections of the interviewer, adding punctuation and grouping sentences into paragraphs, and employing "a minimal amount of shifting sections of the interview to keep similar content together, giving the flow of their story increased clarity" (p. 56). Additionally, in both Veronica and Xochitl's stories (though particularly the latter), a large quantity of verbal hedges (e.g., "um," "like," "well," "you know") and repetitious material of little or no significance for the purposes of this presentation were removed for brevity and ease of reading.

Why these two stories? The rationale behind this choice is more a gut feeling than anything. The qualitative researcher needs to discern the relative importance of one subset of data over another for reasons that are sometimes not easy to articulate, but which might be best described borrowing the cartographer's concepts *count data* versus *intensity data* (Monmonier, 1993), wherein a distinction is made between data which are numerically prevalent and data which are of greater consequence. These two stories, in

the view of this researcher, are broadly representative of a range of the study sample and provide compelling and essential insight into the life experiences of mid-childhood immigrants from Latin America today.

“Might as Well Just Take it All, or Nothing”: Veronica’s Crossing Story

We came all together. My mom was pregnant, she was six months. My little sister was five. We left Mexico city with a black book bag, it was like a little pouch, like a black book bag. One dress, one of the nicest dresses I ever had, pair of socks, pair of underwear, and some shoes. Everybody only had a pair of clothing, to change, that was it, nothing else. And my mom, I remember my mom carried an extra bag where she had food for us, and a blanket, a really warm blanket, like she took the best of everything we had just for the fact that she knew, once we make it, we’re not gonna need anything anymore, so might as well just take it all, or nothing.

It was a struggle from there, from Mexico City to Tijuana, because there’s a lot of stops, and what if you get stuff stolen and whatnot. So going to Tijuana we got stopped there, to do a random check. The police checked us, and the food that my mom had and a couple of things she had for us so we wouldn’t be hungry or something, they took them away. You get to the point where you wanna cry because you see the police getting you and then it’s like, they grab your stuff and you’re like, “This is the only thing I have, what do I do?”, you know, “I don’t have anything else and you’re gonna take this away from me.” So we lasted like, probably another day and a half without eating, just from that, only water. The blanket, we were lucky, they left the blanket.

Once we reached Tijuana, we get there probably like at three in the morning, and as soon as we get there we’re transferred to another car going all the way to the desert, and we get taken there to a ranch, where it’s a White man with his kids. We were the first people coming in and like two-three hours more there was another fifty to a hundred people coming in, into the same place. And where we were sleeping was no bigger than probably these two rooms [indicates interview rooms, roughly eight by 20 feet]. Everybody who was sleeping and that was staying overnight, that was not gonna cross through the desert, what they were gonna have them do was, um, go to sleep either sitting down, or across. My mom pregnant, you know, they tried to make a bed for her, with the only blanket we had, and me and my sister right next to each other. It gets really cold at night.

We stayed there fifteen days. To get to a store from where we were at walking is probably an hour and a half. And not only that, um, the, always the fear of having someone watching you. Because we did have a check once when federals [national police] were coming, but I don’t know how in the world that this happened that we didn’t get checked or something, I don’t know if it was,

because it's so corrupt over there, you might as well just pay them and they'll leave, they won't bother you.

We lasted there fifteen days. I'm telling you right now if I see a Ramen soup, I'm like, "Ewww, I can't see it!" Because that's what we ate. It's like if you starve for a couple of hours you're like, "Oh my god I'm so hungry!" But once you're doing it for three days and you're not allowed to, except for water or maybe pop once in a while, or Ramen soup, it's hard. Water... they only had a big tank of water and we weren't allowed, um, if we were allowed to, that's the only water, or else my dad had to go and buy water, which a bottle of water was probably three to four dollars, just a sixteen-ounce, or a twelve-ounce bottle, cause they were really exploiting the hell out of people, you know, they were just trying to make money. Between those fourteen days I had a seizure, I got contaminated water, which I ended up having worms in my stomach, and I had, I fainted twice, from dehydration.

Then we get told, "OK, you guys are ready, we're gonna have you go." It was a Nissan, it was a small car, I remember it was blue, too. So they tell us, "What we're gonna do is we're gonna pack you guys up. You're gonna be packed." So it was my dad, me and my sister on top of my dad, two ladies on top of us, two other kids on top of them, and one extra lady that fitted, I don't know how they fitted, but there was a bunch of us in the back.

My sister was trying to make holes somewhere so she could breathe. And since the car was somewhat rusty she kinda opened a hole in the middle of the car. I don't know, seriously I don't know if it was luck that we were having, because we were just, we knew what to do, but we didn't know why.

My mom was going in the front, because she's really light-complected, she easily would have passed as somebody, and for some reason she actually looked like the wife of the *coyote*, which she's also a resident from here. So it was easy for them to say, well, she's pregnant, she's about to give birth, cause she was pretty big, you know, and say, well, she needs to leave. My mom had two ladies like under the bottom of the leg. So, I don't know how they like overlapped them, I know in total we were, there was eleven of us in that car, hidden everywhere, from the bottom of the car to the top of the car.

And it's true what they say now that there's camouflage. There is camouflage, even if people don't want to believe it, there is camouflage, when they put people under the bottom of the cars, when they put them on the seats, and they camouflage them with the skin of the seat, that does happen. We had two people that were camouflaged, one that was sitting where my mom was sitting and one that was sitting where the guy that was driving was sitting.

We were trying to go up to a hill, there was a hill before we actually went to the actual highway, and the car got stuck, and my dad was like, "You know what, I don't think we're gonna make it. We already started wrong. We were taking too long, we were taking too long, it's not gonna happen. I have a bad feeling that something's gonna happen." We get there and then we get into the

highway, and he's going, he's going, he's going, and all of the sudden you see blue lights just surrounding, but the top air lights, not like regular police lights, but air lights. And my dad goes, like, "I think they got us already." This was trying to cross from Mexico to Arizona, that was the first time. And he sees the blue lights, and he's like, "I think there's another cop just on top of us, I don't know." And I'm like, you gotta be kidding me.

The guy, the guy that was crossing us, ran out into the woods. We never saw him again. And we get retained. And they pat you and they do all this stuff, and they tell you, "Who was with you?" And they had trained my parents to not say who they were, what they were, we just had to say, "We don't know who they are, we don't know their names, we don't know anything."

We get there, we get to the police station, and... it's totally different. I get sometimes really really really really really upset when people talk bad about the uh, police patrols, and stuff like that, because the way we were treated, when they caught us in Arizona, was totally different from what I had heard before, about, "Oh, once they grab you, they're gonna be mean to you, they're gonna try to punch you, they're gonna try to beat you up, they're gonna..." And it was nothing like that, they actually, me and my sister we still have the little dolls they gave, they gave my sister a little Mickey Mouse, and I got a bear. And they gave us like chips and pop. We hadn't ate in like, like in two days, because they were trying to get us to be forced down [in the car] so we wouldn't you know, throw up or something. And I was like, you know, I was amazed, and they were like, "You guys want more? You guys want to eat?"

They sent us back [...]. We make a second attempt, this one was a successful, it was a little bit less people, it was in a bigger car, and this time they don't try going over the border just randomly but they actually go through the, the, actual border, where it's permitted to go through as long as my mom was, because, what they used was my mom, as being pregnant, in order to come in.

We stayed in Arizona for another fifteen days, because they were trying to get everything to be from point A to point B safe in order for us to travel. And it was another different world from where we were at again [...]. There was, I've never seen so many rats in my world like, you know, on the floor! And we were sleeping on floors! Rats, from rats to um, snakes, to snakes, to things like that that I'd never seen. In Arizona my mom made me take twice medicine in order to get anything that I had in my stomach because it was getting bad, it was like, we had different infections in our stomachs for water that we weren't supposed to be drinking, things that weren't clean, we weren't taking showers [...]. Cause there was no soap, there was nothing, we didn't have anything.

You learn a lesson, you know, it's really hard. Some of us got sick, there's people that died when we were there. And we got to see that. You know, we didn't get to say anything, cause we didn't know anything, we didn't know what was going on. And when you see, when you start leaving all your stuff back, your room, your

stuff, it's just, so emotional. But I felt so much better cause I was like, we're going to a new life.

A Model Student (Xochitl's Story)

I love my childhood in Mexico. It's way different from here. You just play around in the neighborhood, it's just fun stuff, very innocent. My daddy was the first one who came to the United States. He came to work you know, 'cause times were rough in Mexico. I was about two years old when he first came. I don't really remember. When he came back I was around five, I had no idea who he was, I used to call my uncle dad. And that would really hurt my dad.

It just got to the point where my mom was like, "We can't be doing this. It's either we, the whole family goes with you, or you come back." And he's like, "You know what, I'm gonna bring you guys to the United States, because I think my kids would have a better life there, when it comes to education and everything." He was real familiar with how things work here. So we came with a visa and everything, and we were able to fly here to the United States.

We were living in the house of my dad's friend, 'cause he said, "Well you guys can stay in the basement. So you guys can start, you know, having your own stuff, since you guys just came here." It wasn't that bad, his wife was really nice, she would take us out to walk around the neighborhood, just to get to know the area.

In my mind always it was like, OK, there's opportunities here, I have to take them, I have to take advantage of them. I talked to my counselor in like 8th grade, and she gave me an application for [two magnet high schools], and I was like, I didn't even know about these schools. And she's like, "Just fill it out."

Well, I got accepted. And I told my parents and they're like, "Well, where's that school?" My parents, they don't really know English. So they're always kind of like.... They try to be there, but they didn't know what to do. So my mom was like, "OK, so where's this school at, and is it good?"

I was a little nervous when we had to go to visit the school because everybody there was American, you know, White, Caucasian, and I felt like a minority there. My first day of school I met my best friend, she's half Filipina half Polish and I thought she was Hispanic because she looks Hispanic, you know.... She, we started just talking, and since then I kinda became like, kind of like a more open person. I realized that everyone here is the same, you know, even if I'm Hispanic they see you as just a regular person, you know, they don't say, "Oh don't talk to her because she's Hispanic." No, it's just diversity. I was like, I'm talking to an Asian person! It wasn't very common for me. I'm talking to an Indian person! I mean, it's a good thing.

Towards the middle of my freshman year, that was when I realized, this is good, I like this. I like this. And even, I would see my friends from middle school on the bus sometimes, and they would be like, "Oh my god, why did you go to that high school?" And I would be like, "What's wrong with that high school?"

And they're like, "It's all smart and White people." And I'm like, "No, they're really nice. It just, it's a good school, but they're really nice."

I'm glad I went there to high school. I don't regret it at all, going there. I feel happy and proud that I actually went there. You know, I think it made me improve myself in every aspect. Language-wise, personality, the way I think, stuff like that. It really helped me out.

Since I was little I wanted to become an engineer. Since I was in probably 4th grade. I always wanted to go to college, cause I had it set, I really wanted to become an engineer, and to get to that you need to, higher level of education. But when I was in high school, that's when it really kind of got to me, OK, this is coming. What am I gonna do? And my parents and I would talk about it, and we started realized that school was expensive, just applying and going there.

Most of my friends went to universities right after high school. And it just kind of got to me. I'm like, "Well, I'm going to a community college," and they're like, "But why? But why?" You know, I don't qualify for financial aid. And they wouldn't understand that. So I'm just like, OK, just keep it to myself, you know.

I applied to [two universities], so, they both admitted me there, and they know about my situation. I don't qualify for financial aid and they offer me scholarships, you know, they look at my grades, they look at my GPA, and they're like, "Well, you know, we don't have a problem admitting you...." It's just, they even worry, "How are you gonna pay your school?" And I'm like, exactly, I need options here, scholarships or any type of help. So I'm working on them. They're offering me like internships, where they can pay me everything for me, the dorm there, or participate in research programs, like... you know, just for me to be able to attend college.

It's very competitive, and in a way it makes me feel kind of lucky that I got admitted, because even my advisor was like, "You know, I don't want to discourage you, but considering your situation, I don't know if they're gonna be able to accept you." And I'm just, I don't see why my status should be a concern. I mean, I guess my grades speak for myself. I have a good record. I don't see why not, why can't they give me a chance.

It's hard. A lot of people don't understand that. I have to pay out of my pocket. I mean, my parents help me whatever they can. I work part-time, enough for me to pay my school, or anything that I need. But it's hard because, even if it's just like a thousand dollars per semester, it's like, it hurts.

I always feel like I've had at certain times in my life people who, even though I'm friends with them, they see me as something different. They're like, "You're not one of us. You're not completely part of our group." And I get along with everyone, I talk to everyone, I'm open to new people, I'm pretty much friends with everyone, and my friends know that.

Now most of my friends are Caucasian, American, but that's because I feel like, I can identify myself more with them, you know. I'm comfortable

talking to them because like, four years in high school, that's what I experienced. And that's what I got used to.

When I came here to GCC it was like going back to sixth, seventh and eighth grade. And it was just like, again a new environment. So I came here and the first friend that I made was actually Caucasian. I have other Hispanic friends, and they're like, "Oh, you're really nice and stuff, we had the wrong idea about you." And I'm like, "Why?" And they're like, "Because you talk to white people. You're not like, Hispanic." And I'm like, "How am I not Hispanic?" It's like, "You act White." And I'm like, "How can you say a person acts White?"

It doesn't mean because I talk to American people or Caucasian people that I'm stuck up or I wanna be White. No, it's just part of who I am. And I truly believe that a lot of people my age, and in general Mexicans, we need to improve ourselves, you know? Cause if they always see us like speaking Spanish and not trying, you know, to actually improve ourselves, they're gonna have us in a bad, you know, way. There's a lot of people that are like, "Oh, she's Mexican, she doesn't do good," or "They're not gonna do good."

I have many American friends, our graduation is coming, and they're like, "You're bringing your parents?" And I'm like, "Yeah, definitely, my mom, dad, and brothers are coming." And they're like, "Let's go to dinner." And I'm like, "Sure, but I'm bringing my family, I mean, I hope that's OK." And then one of them said, "Uh, there's no way I'm bringing my family, are you kidding me? No, they can stay at home. What do you think this is? Just leave them..." I'm like, "No, that's not how it works with me." You know, this is something big for my parents, since they didn't attend their college, and my brother dropped out of college. And I'm like, I don't wanna do the same thing. I just want to continue school.

Most of my friends, they're at DePaul, UIC or, yeah, four-year institutions. I'm pretty much one of the only ones that actually had to come to a community college. And, now that I told my friend that I'm transferring, she's like, "Wow, that's great!" But she's like, "I still don't understand why you went to a community college." And I'm just like, I feel like I can tell her, at the same time, like, well maybe it's something I wanna keep to myself, you know, I think it's something very personal. She's my best friend. It's just... She thinks I'm a citizen. Or a resident here. I never say yes, I never say no. Because... I know I can trust her, it's not trusting issues, it's just, it's complicated to explain it to a person sometimes, you know. They're like, they don't really understand.

But my friend, he used to come here last semester, we would talk about, "How you gonna pay for your college?" You know cause he's like, "Are you gonna transfer?" And I'm like, "Yeah, you know I'm gonna try and transfer next year." And he's like, "How are you gonna pay for college? It's so expensive, and they don't even help us." So he dropped out of college. So I don't think everyone has actually that will to keep fighting or to keep going, because people get discouraged too.

I think the main thing is... being undocumented you know has definitely inspired me to keep going and going, you know to not stop and to—I don't know, it's hard to explain, it's just something you feel, the will to do something. Like you're actually willing to push yourself to do something.

My little brother, he's eight years old, he's growing up. And he knows about our situation, and... I guess that's good, you know, cause it makes him feel like I must take advantage of whatever's given to me, you know, because I don't have to work as hard as me or my brother or my family. I think it's good, to him, he's understanding about life.

I'm not afraid, just because I know either me or my family have done nothing wrong in this country. All we've pretty much done is help this country because we consume here, we live here, my dad pays, all of us pay taxes, my dad bought a house, so it's like, you know, we have done nothing wrong here. We're only here to, I guess, to have a better life.

I'm not afraid at all. I'm more afraid of not actually getting the opportunities, but not of what's gonna happen to me. I think we have a good record and, you know, I don't see why something bad could happen to us just because... I mean, people could check and, you know, they know we're good people, you know. We have done nothing wrong. We just came here to work, go to school, and pretty much that's it. So I'm not afraid, but My little brother sometimes, since he knows, stuff, he hears in the news like, oh they're deporting many people, and he's like, "I don't want you guys to get deported." And we just try to kind of explain it to him.

It does make me work harder, my status and everything. I guess my base motivation is like, if other people are like, doing it, why can't I do it? I can do it too. And I think I have the potential to do it.

Consistency and Validity in Immigrant Narratives

"I love my childhood in Mexico." Thus, Xochitl begins her story. Her use of the present tense might be blamed on a language learner's error, except that after living for several years in the U.S. and completing middle school and high school here, Xochitl's English is virtually indistinguishable from that of an educated native speaker. No mere linguistic miscue, her use of the present tense reveals her positioning of herself in relation to the subject of her childhood: She is not asserting that she loved it then (though this is a possibility) but rather that from her present position she loves the remembrance of her childhood.

This is an essential condition of narrative research. Spoken data are the outward artifacts of an internal vision, a looking through lenses of time and experience at that which outwardly does not exist (or no longer exists): the past. Revisiting Blanchot (1981), van Manen (2006) applies the philosopher's famous re-interpretation of the tale of Orpheus to the task of the qualitative researcher, whose interest is the practice of telling, of putting into words that which is past, "to uncover a truth that seems almost within reach" (p. 717).

Almost. I would posit further that this is at the least a two-layered endeavor: The researcher must find a way to put what he has learned into words, true, but the basis of that learning – narrative data – is in turn the product of the subject/narrator's telling, an undertaking equally as complex. When Orpheus defies the gods and turns to look at Eurydice, he does so not for fear of losing her, Blanchot (1981) says, but out of the innate human desire to know the unknowable, "to see her not when she is visible, but when she is invisible" (p. 100). Van Manen (2006) concludes: "What Orpheus came to seek in the darkness of the Underworld was not a lost love but the meaning of love itself" (p. 717). In just this way, Xochitl, in looking back upon her childhood, sees not her youth but the meaning its memory holds in her present: her childhood not merely as a series of events, but a representation of innocence, clarity, simplicity and, inevitably, loss. As Atkinson (1998) describes it, the life story approach is powerful because "the very act of telling one's story is an act of meaning making" (p. 62).

At the same time, Xochitl told her story in the context of an interview at a college in her adopted (or adoptive) country, at the behest of an interlocutor of a particular

background with similarities and dissimilarities from her own, though she can discern these only incompletely. Her telling of her story was shaped by some combination of what she experienced, what she best recalls, what she wishes her immediate listener (and possibly other listeners, by extension) to glean from her story, what impressions of her situation and of her self, her family or her community she wishes to project to that listener (those listeners). Her narrative is “powerfully shaped by social, cultural, and historical conventions as well as by the relationship between the storyteller and the interlocutor” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 214).

Inconsistency is a common feature of autobiographical narrative data (Borland, 1990; Charmaz, 2001), and may be particularly so in immigrant narratives. The telling of human experience is fraught with incongruities and contradictions. As Veronica tells the story of her family’s harrowing attempts to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, she says at one point that they stayed fifteen days in a safe house, at another point fourteen days. In one version they were without food for an extended time, in another version (within the same narrative) they ate Ramen noodles day after day. In other participants’ stories, they change ages on arrival, being twelve one minute and eleven the next. This is to be expected: In most cases, these may be details which have seldom if ever been requested of them. (As we get older and have passed over major autobiographical material many times, our milestones become more and more fixed; to the adolescent and young adult, such details are of little interest. A year past is an unimaginably wide chasm.) The immigrant experience, an experience marked by upheaval and dislocation, may present particular challenges to the task of recalling and constructing an orderly narrative. And

being undocumented, as most of participants in this study are or were, may further complicate the task: Living a life in which one is “invisible to anybody” (in Veronica’s words) and in a state of constant jeopardy would presumably foster habits of secrecy and misdirection.

But inconsistency can go beyond mere details, to attitudes and perspectives: Jose affirmed his belief that there is little cultural difference between the U.S. and Mexico, but within minutes admitted that as a Mexican he felt like an alien in U.S. culture. Several participants expressed contradictory views about their ethnic enclave community, speaking fondly of it in one breath and in the next depicting it as a limitation. Such inconsistency is normal and provides essential texture to narrative, the telling of which, in the words of Chanfrault-Duchet (1991),

makes it possible to go beyond the preconstructed discourses and “surface assertions” collected through survey research [and] highlights the complexity, the ambiguities, and even the contradictions of the relations between the subjects and the world, the past, and the social and ideological image. (p.89)

One means of ensuring trustworthiness in narrative inquiry is to strive to establish internal validity by seeking consistency within a given story, even if simultaneously maintaining “the assumption of multiple constructed realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 295). In the case of specific details, particularly if they vary excessively (e.g., if a participant claimed to be eight years old on arrival and later changed this to eleven), it might be important to seek clarification; this depends on the aims and design of the inquiry. In the data collected for this study, however, discrepancies regarding concrete details were minor and arguably present no significant validity concerns.

But what of those inconsistencies that involve attitudes and perspectives? One

approach would be to pursue the question to discover whether the participant can choose a singular position on an issue where contradiction is evident. But this could as easily lead away from understanding as toward it. When Jose says at one point that he sees little difference between his two cultures and elsewhere reveals that he feels a dissonance, in both instances his perspective may represent a genuine belief, and his holding both may not be contradictory but revelatory. (This possibility, together with this researcher's estimation of what is revealed therein, are pursued further in Chapter Seven.)

Though it is perhaps more apparent in immigrants, we are all to some degree made up of multiple personas or selves. Yale psychologist Paul Bloom (2008) has been instrumental in bringing together emerging research in psychology and neuroscience which support the theory that "each of us is a community of competing selves" (¶4). Anyone who has lived in more than one language and culture knows that this is more than theory; for the culture-crosser the experience of inhabiting multiple selves in competition with each other can be quite evident and even startling. In my own experience, observers have on various occasions described me (usually with a degree of shock) as a "different person" when, after having known only English-speaking North American me, they meet Spanish-speaking quasi-Latino me, or vice versa. In a life that continually traverses milieus in which one or the other self feels more at home, I am frequently conscious of the jostling which goes on between the two. The Jose who sees little cultural difference between the U.S. and Mexico is the analytical, budding academic, Midwestern Jose, while the one who feels the pain of cultural loss is the adventurous Mexican boy from the highlands of Jalisco. These selves may be

contradictory, but both reveal something about Jose, and to ask him to reconcile the two for the sake of the internal consistency of my research would not enhance that revelation but artificially distort and diminish it.

This is not to say that self-examination is not useful; if in fact Jose were to engage in such and if thereby he were able to smooth the edges of his internal dissonance, this would perhaps be a desirable outcome for him. (This is assuming that he perceives his inconsistencies as undesirable dissonance, which is not at all clear; this question is pursued in Chapter Seven.) It might also be possible (and illuminating) to identify and map, by way of analysis, the points at which a study participant like Jose inhabits and switches between one self or another, but this would require a research model designed for such purposes; such was not an aim of this study.

It is central to the worldview of the qualitative researcher that beneath surface inconsistencies lie larger understandings, that while we must pay attention to the inconsistencies, these do not constitute compelling reason to discount the underlying message. Indeed, despite certain discrepancies within the data collected here (and these were, it should be noted, no more apparently prevalent than one might expect in any project of personal narrative-making), it is an essential premise of this study and of any such study that the stories these participants told do suggest larger truths. Far more illuminating is the insight to be gained by considering the participant as an individual in which multiple, competing, and often contradictory selves co-exist, peacefully or otherwise. This is part of the human condition, a part probably more pronounced in immigrants than others, and their stories consistently reflect it.

CHAPTER FIVE

CROSSING OVER: ARRIVAL AND TRANSITION

The findings presented in Chapters Five and Six are organized based first on chronological order and then on thematic categories. Chronologically, the presentation is broken down into two larger segments: Chapter Five covers pre-migration through high school, which encompasses arrival and the period of adjustment and adaptation extending roughly through the end of childhood; Chapter Six covers the college experience and attendant issues.

In the present chapter and the following three (through Chapter Eight), findings are presented together with analysis and interpretation of their possible meanings. The manner and order in which they are organized and presented, of course, also contribute substantially to revealing that analysis and interpretation. In addition to this ongoing presentation of findings, separate subsections specifically labeled “discussion” offer more extended analysis and synthesis of the preceding material.

“Over There”: Life Before Migration

Though the term “over there” may sound like a cliché (or a reference to a George M. Cohan song), it is in fact quite commonly employed by immigrants to refer to the country of origin. In an extreme case, Francisco used the expression four times in five sentences (this quote can be found later in this chapter). Participants frequently used “over there” in making specific comparisons between the country of origin and that of

current residence (“over here”), as seen in Lidia’s description of life in Honduras compared to the U.S.:

[In Honduras], where you live, your block, it’s like a family. Over here, it’s like you barely know your neighbors. You know? I think that’s how I feel, like everybody’s so closed, like literally in their little box, their house, like they go out when they have to work or something, and over there it’s nothing like that, it’s the total opposite. Everybody knows everybody.

This habit of comparison – how it is practiced by participants and how it relates to the “dual frame of reference” concept established in migration literature (Suárez-Orozco, 1989) – is explored more fully in Chapter Seven.

Another way in which “over there” was used is in describing the country of origin without making explicit comparisons, such as when recounting childhood memory.

Participants characterized their childhoods in ways which align roughly with statements like Xochitl’s “I love my childhood in Mexico,” or Marta’s more extended,

I loved the life in Mexico. I felt it was much, it was free, I felt free in Mexico. Because here I felt that from school to home and then from home to school and that’s basically all I did. Because I wasn’t able to walk around and go meet with my friends.

These statements by Lidia, Xochitl, and Marta contain the four most common elements that participants included when describing their early childhood in the country of origin: (a) a fondness for the memory, (b) the sense of freedom, (c) a sense of connectedness with extended family and others in the community, and (d) the observation that these feelings of freedom and connectedness for the most part disappeared when they moved to the U.S.

Living Conditions in the Home Country

Conventional wisdom holds that the conditions people leave behind when

choosing to immigrate to a new country are generally difficult and even untenable, especially in the case of undocumented immigrants, and especially when the living conditions the new immigrants endure in the new country are substandard. Such perceptions are supported by both historical and anthropological evidence (Chavez, 1992) and family anecdote (e.g., this researcher's forebears fled the apparently real prospect of starvation during the 19th century Irish potato famines), as well as by immigrant narratives presented in films and books like *El Norte* (Flynn, 2003), *Maria Full of Grace* (Marston, 2004), *Lost in Translation* (Hoffman, 1989), *Angela's Ashes* (McCourt, 1996), and *The Question of Bruno* (Hemon, 2000), which depict individuals fleeing dire poverty, violence, political persecution, and war. Certainly among migrants around the world, such backgrounds are typical: They provide the motive for flight.

Nonetheless, in the present study only one participant described pre-migration living conditions which might be characterized as verging on the truly intolerable. Veronica spoke of suffering from hunger and want to a degree that required her as a small child to work to help support the family, circumstances which finally led her parents to decide to migrate:

My dad had worked in bars, my dad had worked everywhere, we even had our own business, like a little fruit stand and stuff like that, they would sell foods, my mom knew a lot how to, um, she would make clothes, and then she would sell it, and she would do all that kind of stuff. And I would be helping at all times, all the times I would be there to help. And it was just so bad, we were just like "That's it, we can't do it anymore."

The other participants described the situations of their families in the country of origin as not unbearable, but rather as at worst defined by economic challenges (often chronic) and the desire for better opportunities for children. The families in most cases

owned their homes (in some cases more than one), and in some cases the living conditions were described as quite comfortable; several attended private or parochial schools, and nearly all lived in places where extended family and community networks played a significant role in supporting their social and economic stability.

However, parental employment was often described as problematic and tentative. It is also possible that the memory of relative comfort or stability may have been related to a childish lack of ability to grasp the situation, combined with parents' efforts to protect children from worries, as Roxana acknowledges:

I did have a good life over there. We had the house, we had everything. My mom had her, the beauty salon in the house. My dad was working. Well that's that I saw, when I was little, maybe there was a lot of problems going around which at that time you don't even, you can't understand.

Overall, the narrative data indicate that participants' families made the decision to immigrate not because of any impending existential threat or extreme suffering, but rather the combination of a desire for improved prospects for their children and the existence of a perceived opportunity (usually in the form of relatives already present in the U.S.) which could aid their migration.

Parental Absence, Internal Migration, and Family Separation

With few exceptions, participants' families experienced often lengthy periods of separation, most commonly involving parental absence. This aligns with the findings of Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) who, in an extensive longitudinal study of Latino immigrant families, found that 85% of the children in their sample experienced family separations of varying lengths of time.

For many immigrant children, their pre-migration years are spent largely in

single-parent homes, typically because the father has gone to seek work abroad. An example is Xochitl's father, who went abroad to work when she was two years old, with predictable consequences: "When he came back, I was around five, I had no idea who he was. I used to call my uncle dad."

Nadia's father was a similarly distant figure during her childhood; she didn't really live with him until the age of fourteen. Similarly, because Jose's father had lived mostly in the U.S. since even before Jose's birth, the two did not spend significant time together until Jose immigrated at the age of eleven.

Lidia's story was unique in that the absent parent was her mother, who had left Honduras when Lidia and her sister were toddlers to seek opportunities in the U.S. while leaving her youngest daughters in the care of their father and grandmother. In this case, the girls were separated not only from their mother but from older siblings, who had also migrated to the U.S.

Although Marta's father remained in Mexico, his work required almost constant travel and so before they migrated he was little more than a shadowy presence in the family:

[In Mexico] maybe 90% of the time it was just my mom and my brothers and my sister. My dad wasn't really there much. His job, he had to be travelling from one place to another so he would be gone for days at a time. And then when he would come back all he would want to do is rest. So we really didn't see him much.

Even for families which remain largely intact in the home country, internal migration is a common accompaniment to employment shortages. It is not surprising that those who eventually migrate to another country might first attempt to find economic stability within their country of origin. Daniel described his family's peregrinations as

they moved five times within Mexico, always because “someone offered [his father] better work.” Similarly, within the year before coming to the U.S., Andres and Gerardo’s parents had made two major moves within Mexico and were planning another, with predictable effects: Regarding the period immediately before and after their migration, Gerardo said, “I went to five different schools in a period of two years, two and a half years.” When the brothers came to the U.S., they lived at first with relatives while they waited for their parents to join them.

Ellen experienced a combination of family separation together with internal migration. She lived with her grandparents in Mexico City while her father was in U.S. and her mother sought opportunities elsewhere, then moved to another state in Mexico where her father tried to find work, and finally moved back to Mexico City before migrating to the U.S.

Cultural Diversity and External Influences in the Country of Origin

Defining “culture” is a problematic enterprise to say the least, and not one prone to lead to consensus. If there is one point on which agreement might be approached, however, it would be this: Culture is never a singular thing. Within countries, within regions, within cities and neighborhoods, within groups – even within families¹³ – culture manifests in different ways.

Asked to comment on the differences he perceived between U.S. and Mexican culture, Jose was willing only to characterize the environs of his own town, explaining, “I

¹³ This is true especially in immigrant families, wherein each individual’s age on arrival can strongly influence their degree of acculturation.

don't think I can speak for the other parts of the country, because Mexico is deeply diverse. It's very, very diverse."

Just as the cultural diversity of Latin America is remarkable, so is the extent to which other countries are affected by cultural influences from outside their own borders. In the participant group for this study, although most individuals were willing to make generalizations about cultural traits (as even Jose did quite readily, in fact, at other points in his interview), they also revealed how messy a phenomenon culture is, and how much cross-cultural overlap and bleed-through occurs, particularly in this age of relatively easy travel and global telecommunications.

Several participants described being influenced by external cultural influences even before migrating. Daniel explained how even as his friends played soccer, "since I was a little kid I always wanted to play football," while Roxana was a dedicated fan of U.S. basketball (she was thrilled to be moving to the hometown of Michael Jordan, whose poster-sized photo had graced her childhood bedroom). Ellen related how her mother had named her after a character in an English novel. Similarly, if on a less prosaic level, while claiming to embrace his Mexican cultural heritage and reject most of what non-Mexican culture offers (e.g., Britney Spears), Jose demonstrated at various points in his interview a tendency to adhere to a habit of logical reasoning which emerged from nineteenth century German research universities and which he acquired from his postsecondary studies in the U.S.

In particular, the consideration of cultural influences on immigrants to the U.S. must bear in mind the global reach of what Rumbaut (1999) terms "premigration

Americanization” (p. 189). Discussions of acculturation – such as those arising within this study – inevitably occur in the context of this kind of messiness, and it is useful to note evidence that even prior to migrating, at least some of the participants found the experience of cross-cultural interplay to be of some significance in their lives.

Arrival and Schooling in The New Setting

For children, the world is typically comprised primarily of three places: home, school, and everywhere else. Viewed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) social ecology construct (as described in Chapter Three), this arrangement would comprise two microsystems nested within a macrosystem. Although the experience of migration involves radical alteration of all three, the home is the microsystem most likely to retain some continuity in the new location, as it is largely defined by family members who travel together. Settings such as the new neighborhood may present challenges, but newly arrived children are typically not left to fend for themselves on the streets.

The school, in contrast, is a setting into which the immigrant child ventures alone. Unlike the home and family, school in the new country represents mainly unknown challenges, challenges which can give rise to maximum adaptive stress.

Though it may in practice represent something of a trial-by-fire, schooling is indispensable to the child’s acculturation process, a vital instrument of sociocultural indoctrination (Phinney, et al., 2001). School is the child’s primary point of interaction with the world outside the immediate family, the microsystem which in turn provides keys to comprehending and navigating the “everywhere else” mentioned above, the unwieldy (and daunting) outside social and cultural environments.

Leaving Home, Crossing Over

Given that the participants generally described their childhood experiences in favorable terms, it is not surprising that they faced the prospect of leaving their homes with mixed emotions. In some cases, the reaction they described was primarily negative, such as when Jose reported, “They pretty much dragged me [to the U.S.]. I wanted to stay. I had a pretty good life.”

Carmen reported being afraid at the thought of going to a new country, but her fears combined with positive feelings as well:

In a way I was frightened, but I think I was more excited than anything else. Because I had other family members, older family members who had been here, and they had nothing but great things to say about it. It’s so clean, it’s so nice, you can have anything you want!

Having other family members already present in the new setting, often parents but also siblings and other relatives, can allay fears of the unknown. Roxana described being “so excited to come here, my cousins my uncle were here in Chicago.” However, once she had arrived and it became clear that her family was going to stay in the U.S., her feelings changed: “I never thought I was gonna stay here.... And I was upset, I remember crying all summer, I just wanted to go back, just wanted to go back.”

Like Carmen, Xochitl had received positive messages about the U.S.:

I truly felt lucky, because some of my friends, their parents were here in the United States also, like their dad would be here working and they would be, “Oh, I wish my mom would take me over there, they say it’s like really nice, it’s really good over there.” It’s just this perspective, that the United States is like the best thing. I felt lucky, you know? I told her, “Yeah, I wanna go, yeah.”

But like Roxana, Xochitl came to have misgivings when she realized that the move would be permanent: “I just started kind of thinking more about the fact that I

wouldn't be back. But I was only a child, so...." The feeling that she was "lucky" to be able to go to a place with more opportunities may have helped counterbalance her ambivalence, though both Carmen and Xochitl ascribed this perspective more to others than themselves: "It's just this perspective..." and "they had nothing but great things to say about it."

As a child, taking leave of family members can be a wrenching experience, and more so in the knowledge that the leave-taking is likely to be long-term or even permanent. Lidia and Xochitl described the event thus:

I remember saying bye, it was horrible, it was bad, seeing my dad cry. Cause at first he wasn't, at first he was just hugging us real tight, real tight, and then I remember looking back and saying bye, and my dad was still there and he said bye, and then I remember looking back again, but I didn't say anything to anybody, I saw my dad on the chair crying, and one of his friends was like, um, was hugging him. (Lidia)

I was really excited, didn't really have a problem until I started saying goodbye to my friends, to family and everybody is just crying. I never understood why they would cry, because I thought we were gonna go back, you know, it's like, "Well, we're coming back, right?" My mom was like, "We don't know how things are actually gonna be over there, and..." That's when I was like, OK. It just kinda changed my perspective a little. [...] I just started kind of thinking more about the fact that I wouldn't be back. (Xochitl)

In contrast to these descriptions of leave-taking experiences – and possibly reflecting a perceived sense of how males ought to react to such occurrences – Andres offered a strikingly matter-of-fact description of the experience of being left by his mother at another relative's home in the U.S. before she returned to Mexico. "She pretty much dropped us off," he reported. "We stayed with the same uncle that my sister was living at. She went back."

In the case of individuals who cross the border without legal documentation, the

act of physically travelling from their country of origin to the new country can be stressful and even traumatic. Although roughly half of the participants were undocumented, only two spoke of crossing the border illegally. Of her very difficult entry experience (the narrative of which is presented in Chapter Four), Veronica found at least some instructive value: “You learn a lesson, you know, it’s really hard. Some of us got sick, there’s people that died when we were there. And we got to see that.”

Aside from Veronica, however, none of the participants offered significant details about a clandestine border-crossing experience. In most cases, those who later became undocumented residents did so by overstaying visas rather than entering illegally; since they possessed the needed documents to enter the country, they could do so without risk or discomfort, usually by air. A case which represents a puzzling exception is that of Sara, who volunteered that she crossed the border illegally with her family, and characterized this event as “fun” and “a great experience” even while expressing some ethical qualms: “I felt, I didn’t feel good, because I knew we weren’t doing the right thing. But it was, it was fun. [...] I really enjoyed it.”

Themes and issues surrounding the experience of undocumented immigration and how this status affected the participants who fall into that category are pursued in more detail in Chapter Eight below.

Language Acquisition

As described in the participant narratives, the process of learning English typically began prior to migration (albeit in most cases to a very limited degree) and continued for many years after. Learning to communicate in the new language was seen

to present major challenges encompassing experiences in school, but also at home, in the community, and in the larger sociocultural environment. Participants' descriptions of their language acquisition experiences touched upon such issues as the type of school programs and pedagogical approaches they encountered, their attitudes about the new language and bilingualism, family language use, and the relationship they perceived between language acquisition and acculturation.

Owing to the complexity of the topic and the fact that it involves development across a span of time that covers the periods addressed in both Chapters Five and Six, the question of English language learning is taken up under separate heading in Chapter Seven.

Newcomer School Experiences

Likely boding well as regards parental attitudes toward school, nearly all of the participants' families immigrated during the summer recess, eliminating at least the disruption which might attend mid-semester school entry. Participants volunteered narratives of their initial experiences in school which were striking for their level of detail; in many cases these seemed like "oft-told tales" in family lore, and typically told of being confused and getting lost. Though the experiences described were clearly stressful and even frightening, the stories are generally told with some degree of humor and invariably end well, taking the form of a well crafted triumph-over-adversity narrative. Lidia provided an example:

My mom told my sister, "Take them to school." And the school was like, you walked half a block. My sister saw that a bunch of kids were getting in a bus, and she's like "Get in the bus," and we're like, "No, this is our school. My mommy

said this is our school.” And she was like, “No, but look, everybody’s leaving, you have to go somewhere.” She put us in a bus without knowing where we were gonna go. We ended up in another school! And I mean we were scared. I had my little sister with me, so I had to act older, I had to be mature and I was like, “OK, what do I do?” And they were talking to us in English and we were like, “Well, we don’t know what you’re saying.” Then another lady came – but we were little! – and another lady came and she was like, “Oh, where’s your school?” and I was like, “I don’t know where my school is, I really don’t know.” But then I remembered we had our book bags, and I asked my sister “Do you have the school supplies?” and she’s like “Yeah, it’s in the book bag” So the sheet that they give you, we took it out and we gave it to her and I was like, “That’s my school.” So that was how we were able to get back to the school. I think somebody had to go pick us up. Oh my god, it was so funny.

Though she ends on the note “it was so funny,” clearly the experience of being lost in a foreign place and unable to communicate could only be something close to terrifying for a child of nine who is responsible for her younger sister’s well-being in addition to her own. Lidia’s adult sense of wonder at this is revealed in her interjection “but we were little!” – as if she herself cannot quite fathom how they managed to face such a trial.

The difficulty of the first-day experience and the acute feelings of alienation it entailed are typically established at the outset of the narrative. “It was hard, it was really hard,” Sara reported. “I felt out of place, I didn’t have friends at first, the way the people treated each other was different. The kids, the music, the language, it was totally different.” Roxana echoed this sense of feeling disconnected:

I was scared. Because I thought no one – even though they look Hispanic, I never thought that they would speak Spanish to me. Cause I’m in school you have to speak the language and that’s it. So pretty much I did feel like I was just lonely and no one wanted to talk to me. Yeah it was a little, a little intimidating.

The sense of alienation was evident throughout the narratives. Jose, who like Lidia began his school career in the U.S. by getting lost, recalled:

I went to the wrong classroom. I had to find someone who spoke Spanish so they could translate to the teacher that I was lost. And it was very awkward, the fact that you can't communicate, it's just really really frustrating. You're seen as sort of an alien object.

A striking element in Jose's account is his referring to himself as being perceived by others as not only "alien" but as dehumanized, an "object." Veronica's recounting of her initial school experiences reflects this sense as well. Her story was perhaps the most painful, as it involved not only the natural response of feeling out of place in a new setting, but being actively ostracized by her peers for her poverty and for the color of her skin, which had grown darker during her family's border-crossing sojourn:

At first I was kind of distant, I was distant from everybody, because... I always loved school, but we still didn't have enough resources for me to be dressing right. You know. I was wearing shoes that were already used from a couple of people that we knew, and all this stuff, and so I was picked on the first couple of weeks, I was picked on badly. You have no idea. "They were like, Ha, she's like dark-complected!" Because you're in the desert, you can't control, you get dark. They would tell us, "You're really dark." You're really like this, like that.

Even more troubling to Veronica was the fact that these children looked like her: "You see other people that are the same race as you, that they're the same... except for they were born here and they know English. They picked on me and I was like, OK, what's going on?"

Gerardo spoke of feeling separate from other immigrant children from Mexico, which he attributed to the differences between rural and urban backgrounds:

Even though in my classes I was talking with Mexicans, other people from Mexico, I felt out of place. Because their backgrounds were different. Most of the people that come here are not from cities but from small towns, so that was kind of a new experience too. Because here I was in a new country, with Mexicans, but they weren't like me.... They didn't like me. Their lives are very different.

Gerardo's description reveals a characteristic of many immigrant and non-immigrant

communities alike: persistent division and antipathy between individuals of urban and rural backgrounds. Ultimately, Gerardo observed, he only became close friends with other children from urban backgrounds.

Of the study participants, Ofelia was the oldest when she came to the U.S., entering ninth grade on her arrival. Her age and greater maturity may have helped her to deal with the challenge of the new, and she chose to highlight the comic in this part of her narrative, framing the story as one of triumph over not adversity but embarrassment:

The first day, the lady said to my dad, “OK, that’s fine, she’ll start right now.” And then my dad was like, “OK, fine.” I had to say to my dad, “Bye, I’m going to class!” But my dad followed me into the class, and I turned around and my dad’s walking behind me, and I was like, “Dad, bye, I have to go to class!” I don’t know what my dad was thinking, but I was like, “Bye, I have to go!”

Perception of U.S. Schools as Academically Lagging

Given the lower rate of academic success among Latino childhood immigrants as compared to their native-born peers (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009), a puzzling feature emerging from the narrative data was the near-universal conviction that schooling in Mexico was of a far higher caliber than that in the U.S. Even with the added burden of learning a new language, participants reported that they found the demands of their new schools to be far less rigorous than that in their country of origin. However, this may have more to do with the low quality of education in receiving communities in the U.S. than with exceptionally high quality schools abroad. Ready and Brown-Gort (2005) observed that immigrant children living in ethnically isolated enclave communities are typically “clustered into under-resourced, high-poverty schools that too often have not met the expectations of residents” (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005, p. 15), and as described in

Chapter One, the public schools in the communities where most participants lived were decidedly below par. The failure of schools to meet expectations was clearly a prevalent view among the participants in this study.

Veronica described how because she was more advanced than her third-grade classmates, her teacher would allow her to pursue other interests in class: “All that stuff that they were studying I already knew, to the point where I had to, I would be the kid that got left out – ‘You already know this, go over there, do something else.’” Lidia attributed a love of school to her positive early childhood education, while of her impression of schooling in the U.S. she reported,

It wasn’t hard. You know honestly it wasn’t hard. It was kind of like I was nervous cause I didn’t know how to talk English and everyone else was talking English around me and I was like, I don’t know what they’re saying. But I don’t know, little by little we started learning. [...] I think I was ahead. Only because in Honduras it’s so much harder. There’s so much more homework. And there’s so much more that’s wanted from you, and expected of you.

Others offered similarly unfavorable assessments of U.S. schools in comparison with those they had attended in Mexico:

Over here it’s like, you’re on spring break. You don’t even do anything. Over there in *secundaria* (middle school) you have like eleven courses, you have more pressure. It’s a lot of work, and they push you more than here. Like right here, you can relax and get a good grade. (Nadia)

Over there it’s more advanced. The schooling over there is harder. Over there, they don’t just pass you. I know here, especially in elementary school, everybody just pretty much passes on to the next grade. Over there they’re very strict on letting kids go on to the next level. (Francisco)

I was never really pushed into learning the language, and the material was at a lower level than I had studied in Mexico. Even for, the next two years, it was still lower than I had, it was at the same level that I had studied or lower. So I wasn’t really learning anything new. I was never really challenged. (Gerardo)

Displaying his determination to make lemonade from the lemons on offer at his local public school, Daniel observed that the lower demands and lagging course content created a situation favorable for language learning: “I was learning English here and I was learning to translate all this stuff that I knew already, from Mexico.” Francisco concurred:

When I came, math and things like that, I knew how to do it, so it was pretty easy. So that didn’t take away from my time for learning the language. So I guess that allowed me to be more focused on learning English.

In some cases, the participants’ dissatisfaction with schooling began with being placed into what they perceived to be the wrong grade on their arrival in the U.S.. For example, after being initially sent to second grade, Carmen reported,

I was frustrated because I already knew everything that was going on. I mean, even at eight years old I was really excited to learn English and start things, a whole new set of things. So we actually spoke to the principal, and he got me to move up to third grade.

The lone dissenter from the overwhelmingly negative perspectives was Marta, who found the school she attended in the U.S. to be “way more challenging” than what she had experienced in Mexico.

The New “System”: Cultural Learning and Adapting

Explaining what is necessary for immigrants to be successful in a new setting, Andres characterized the task as comprising two parts: “You need to know English, and you need to know the system.” What is this “system”? The apparent simplicity of Andres’s formula in fact entails a complex process of cultural learning and adaptation, a pathway fraught with potential pitfalls and one which cannot be traversed alone. Given a fortuitous combination of family and community influences, institutional programming,

friendly assistance, and individual character traits, some degree of success is commonly achieved, even under less than ideal circumstances.

Failure, though, looms as a very concrete possibility. Most immigrants (and those of us who have lived or worked with immigrants) have witnessed cases of peers and even loved ones who simply could not bear up under the strain of the new. For some, the remedy is to return to the country of origin; for others, and for children especially, this is often impossible. In a game of such high stakes, it is perhaps not surprising that the players would adopt, among the tools in their survival kit, a modicum of bravado. Echoing Andres in this regard, Marta described the possible outcomes immigrants face in trying to adapt to the new “system” with dichotomous and rather disturbing simplicity: “Either you get used to it, or you’re out of luck.”

Role of Home-Culture Informants

Seeking the company of peers from the home culture has been seen to support cultural adaptation (Wilkinson, 1998), as young newcomers use the home-culture group as a sort of safe haven, an intentionally constructed, familiar microsystem from which to venture out into the new culture. In addition, this social group serves as a source of cultural information and practical advice useful for navigating the new environment.

Virtually all of the participants described significant contact with more experienced home-culture peers in the initial school experience, often relying upon them from the very first day, as when Jose found himself in the wrong classroom and instinctively turned to the nearest child who looked like he might speak Spanish for help. Andres explained the relationship more explicitly:

Most of the kids were Hispanic, I mean, same idea, just moved in like one or three years before us. So obviously they were more adapted to the school system, but I mean it was easy 'cause I guess we had some people, some students give us some pointers. I guess that kind of helped, cause most of the kids spoke Spanish. [...] You could always ask them and they had been here for a few years, so they knew.

In addition to information, the sense of a shared struggle contributes to strengthening relationships, which for young immigrants may provide an enduring sense of connectedness:

I had a couple of other friends that I met there in that class that they were just like me, they had just gotten from Mexico and they didn't speak a word of English, so we sort of bonded. We remained pretty close in those days. (Jose)

Xochitl – who would later go to school outside of the enclave community and become more deeply acculturated into a larger, multi-ethnic social sphere, with some degree of attendant estrangement from her co-ethnic group (as evidenced in the narrative presented in Chapter Four and discussed further in Chapter Seven) – described her initial feeling of refuge among peers who had recently immigrated from Mexico: “I was comfortable around people my own race. Just for the fact that I didn't know English and I had to speak to them, I knew I could talk in Spanish, I felt kind of safe that way.”

Significance of Teachers and Other Mentors at School

Among the challenges faced by mid-childhood immigrants is the dearth of family and social contacts who are knowledgeable about the new academic setting (Preto-Bay, 2003). This heightens the importance of mentors from outside the family and social realms. Such individuals, most often school teachers or staff members, can play a major role in the success of immigrant students.

This was an area in which outcomes seemed to depend on both students' skill (at

identifying and connecting with helpful individuals) and luck (coming into contact with suitable candidates). Some participants seemed especially fortunate in this regard while others found themselves at the other side of the spectrum, like Carmen, who described her first years in school under the tutelage of a series of non-English-speaking teachers who took little interest in the progress of their students, in English or any other subject.

Roxana, in contrast, characterized her experience with her teachers as mixed and tending toward the positive. She began her account of this by allowing that some teachers were of little help, possibly because of a lack of knowledge of how to teach English language learners:

Some of them they would be like, “Oh, you have to do this,” and that’s it. “Oh, if you don’t understand, go over to another teacher. Or find it on your own.” One of my history classes, I guess it was just frustrating for her, it’d be like, “Oh my god, I have this kid, and I have to, I have to leave her behind....” So she would give me less work, but yeah, you would see her like going, “Ah!” [rolls eyes] like “What should I do?”

However, Roxana’s story then took a sharply positive turn, and she described her good fortune in being placed into the care of a teacher who played a supportive role:

My first teacher was learning Spanish because of me. I remember she was giving me the books and she was like giving me the index cards, in Spanish and in English, and at the free time, when they had English, me and her would sit in the back and she would be like, “OK, so how do you say this?” She was like, “Oh, I’m learning Spanish because of you!”

By treating Roxana as a valuable source of knowledge (the Spanish language) rather than a mere vessel to fill, the teacher validated Roxana’s background, provided a sense of grounding and empowerment at a time when these commodities were probably in very low supply in her life. Kumaravadivelu (2006) described this process of reversing the

usual construct in which the teacher plays the role of cultural informant: “By treating learners as cultural informants, we can encourage them to engage in a process of participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge” (p. 208).

When asked to name people who strongly influenced their efforts to succeed in school, the large majority of participants readily cited specific individuals – teachers, staff members, administrators – who played a major role. Marta mentioned a high school teacher who made her believe in her abilities and made her want to become a teacher herself:

I really looked up to him, because it was just, he was just very motivating. He was very, he pushed you to do things in a certain way that you were glad to do them, you did them with patience. He was my English teacher. I really liked the way he taught, and I saw myself doing what he was doing one day.

Xochitl spoke of a middle school counselor who pushed her to apply for selective high schools. The principal at Carmen’s high school became first a mentor and then a close friend of her family. Sara described a supportive teacher in terms which reveal her continuing admiration: “She spoke Spanish, French, and [...] she really encouraged me to continue and learn English. I still remember her, she was a great motivation to me.”

Clearly, the influence of mentors and cultural informants from outside the family and social group microsystems was a significant and in some cases a determining factor in the ability of these students to successfully complete their schooling. To some extent the intervention of helpful individuals may be related to certain skills possessed by the person who stands to benefit from the help; resilience literature suggests that the successful child’s capacity for identifying and connecting with potentially useful adults plays a key role (Benard, 1993). But surely much depends upon luck – that, and the

capacity and willingness of teachers and school officials to provide support, to identify those in the most need and those who can most benefit, and to be assertive in interventions.

Extracurricular Engagement and Acculturation

Based on the data collected in this study, it seems there may be some truth in the popular trope that the primary function of middle and high school is to provide a setting in which young people learn social skills with live ammunition. The large majority of participants cited the significance of their involvement in extracurricular activities, especially in high school, and described this involvement in terms which made clear that it served a purpose not only of helping them to make friends, but to develop a sense of cultural connection to the school and to the larger community and society it served – essential elements in the process of acculturation.

Interestingly, Jose's affinity for a sport commonly associated with Latin America made him an outlier in this study. His pre-migration participation in soccer continued into his residence in the U.S., and though soccer is not commonly viewed as a traditionally North American game, his participation on the team gave him a status in the school social structure that he would not otherwise have had, a status which supported his sense of connection.

Far more common among those participants who joined athletic teams in school were more typically American sports, such as football, track and field, volleyball, and even water polo. One reason for this was likely a desire, whether conscious or not, to "fit in" with the school culture. Andres, Gerardo, and Daniel opted to play American football,

an experience Andres described as liberating him for the first time from the status of “other” in his school. His account is striking in the importance he places on distinguishing himself from the peers who he perceived as having failed to “integrate” into the school culture:

[Playing football] helped to become like more attached to the place, to the school. So we felt like “OK, I’m the new guy so I should be in this corner with the ESL people.” [laughs] ‘Cause I’m pretty sure that’s how most of the ESL students felt. Now, we were in a group... and it’s like the main sport in the school, so we, I guess when we wear a jersey it was like OK, now I’m not so different. I don’t feel so different. And we used to look at those people from ESL, even people that went to the same class the first year or first two years of ESL, they weren’t doing anything with school, so they were still in the process of integrating.

For Andres, the “jersey” was a tangible badge of his belonging, of achieving a goal of being “not so different.” (Certainly immigrants are not the only adolescents for whom this is an intensely – even obsessively – desired outcome.)

Daniel, meanwhile, described his experience on the football team in terms of a triumph over not only adversity but also monolingualism:

Beginning football my freshman year, that was my biggest challenge ‘cause I had to compete against all the guys that have English, they have the experience of playing football before. I had to talk to the coaches, I didn’t know how to talk to them, so little by little I became friends with some guys who helped me to translate, and then I proved to the guys that it wasn’t just cause I didn’t speak English I couldn’t play football. By half the season I was already a starter, on the freshman team.

Gerardo also cited the influence of his joining the football team on his ability to overcome the language barrier and feel more connected:

I guess that’s one of the things that helped me kind of start talking to other people and getting out of, you know, staying away from English-speaking people. You know, doing sports and meeting new people, having to talk to your coaches, having to talk to your teammates.

Similar to the three football players, Ofelia and Sara chose to join sports which they had not participated in before coming to the U.S.: water polo and running, respectively. At the urging of a coach, Sara joined the track and field team, an activity which she credits with helping her develop discipline and which – given her athletic successes – provided her some bargaining power when looking for college options.

Non-sport extracurricular activities figured prominently as well in narratives in which the participants made clear the adaptive and acculturative value of these activities. After her unsatisfactory experience with what she described as monolingual (and presumably also monocultural) Spanish-speaking teachers in her initial years after arrival, and at the strong urging of the principal who became her primary mentor, Carmen finally found a way to connect with the social circle in her school:

I joined a lot of clubs and after-school things. I joined the yearbook club, the book club. It helped me to structure my time, it helped me to relate with people, actually, because up until then I didn't really have friends, I went to school and then I went home. I learned to be a social person and get along with people.

Marta's story was quite similar. Her sense of disconnection was not caused by teachers but by her father's continuing statements of his intent to move back to Mexico, a jarring experience Marta had already undergone once. Added to her father's threats was her unsettled immigration status; between the two issues, she came to feel that there was no point in putting much effort into her education. After a period of discouragement bordering on despondence, Marta finally heeded a favorite teacher's advice and became more active in school clubs and community service activities, a development which she described as a turning point:

We'd do things for like senior citizens. We would go to the senior homes and read.... And we would like arrange dances for them. We had a little, what we called a senior prom, but it was not a senior in high school, and then you would go and ask them one day if they, you know, if they wanted to be your prom date. It was fun, and that teacher really got me involved in school.

In truth, Marta's involvement went beyond school and into the larger community, the "senior homes" where, given that the community's demographic shift toward a significant Latino population has occurred in only the past decade and a half, she presumably interacted with people from not only outside her school but her cultural and linguistic group as well.

Changes in Behavior and Personality

I think my personality changed. I think I was more adventurous in Mexico, and also in my classes in Spanish, but then when I transferred to English classes I felt alone. I was afraid of the English classes, people not speaking Spanish but only English, and I couldn't understand them. I think if you had asked me for an interview when I was in high school, I wouldn't have done it. (Ellen)

Though Ellen's claim regarding how her "personality changed" after immigrating may seem extreme, it was by no means exceptional in the data, which reveal as a prominent theme the changes that mid-childhood immigration effected on participants' behavior, specifically their interaction with others, and consequently on the way they described themselves during that period.

School can be a fraught social environment even for children who have grown up within the local culture, and when combined with the stresses of a new culture and a new language, the effects can be deeply unsettling, especially at the outset. One way of dealing with this threat is withdrawal, as described by Veronica: "At first I was kind of distant, I was distant from everybody. I always loved school. But I was so traumatized,

you know.” Here she not only characterizes how she reacted in the new setting but also explicitly compares this with her attitude when she was a girl in Mexico who had “always loved school.” Gerardo described feeling even as late as high school, “As long as I stay kind of withdrawn, I’ll be fine.”

Marta adopted withdrawal as a defense posture not only at school but also at home, since she felt her parents had made her come to the U.S. against her will:

I didn’t want to speak to anyone. I always isolated myself from everyone. Even at home I isolated myself from everyone. Because I kept telling my parents that I didn’t want to be here. Because I was, I loved the life over there.

Marta’s sense of betrayal arose not only of being made to immigrate, but then being brought back to Mexico just when she had come to feel at home in her new setting, only to have the whole process repeat itself when her parents decided to return to the U.S.:

I had gotten used to the idea of being in one place and getting pulled out of it, and I think I just wanted to not get acquainted with anybody else but just myself and being alone, so that way it wouldn’t hurt that much when I would be, you know, taken out of the country or the school.

Her desire to avoid being hurt again extended to her younger brother, in whom she saw her own experience reflected: “I used to see him and he didn’t want to do anything. He didn’t want to play with other kids. He became very antisocial when we were here. He was very intimidated by other kids.”

The centrality of language to the feelings of isolation is apparent in Roxana’s comparison of her personality traits before and after immigrating:

I was a little bit more shy to talk to people ‘cause sometimes you’re afraid to not pronounce the words exactly, so that’s why you just stay quiet. And that’s me right there, I would just be shy and I would stay quiet. Just keep it to myself. [...] I wasn’t shy over there, not that I remember. But when I got here, that’s what, it’s just that you don’t even know what to say, ‘cause you don’t understand or you

don't know how to pronounce words. So you do get a little intimidated by people around you. [...] I think that was only fifth grade and the middle of sixth grade when I just I found a little group of people that they were in the same situation. So that's when I felt like, "Oh well, I'm not the only one."

It is somewhat surprising that even in a school environment with other immigrant children, Roxana's feeling of intimidation persisted for a considerable period before she was able to feel connected with her classmates.

Arriving at a later stage of maturity than the other participants did not shield Ofelia from the initial experience of withdrawal and isolation. She described this period:

I was a quiet person that didn't ask for help, I was just like in my living room, confused, I don't know about this, I don't know who can help me, I was just there watching *novelas*. I can see that girl, so confused, like when I was sixteen, I can see that girl confused, alone.

When she says "I can see that girl," Ofelia reveals the autobiographer's inescapable position: that of a detached older self observing the younger, sometimes critically or with humor, and other times like Ofelia, with touching sympathy. This unsettling, even painful sense of looking back on childhood hard times as a silent adult witness, powerless to extend a hand, is described poignantly by memoirist Tobias Wolff (1989): "The man can give no help to the boy, not in this matter nor those that follow. The boy moves always out of reach" (p. 27).

Effects of Immigration on the Family

Like any major change in living conditions and circumstances, migration has the potential to transform the life and interactional composition of a family. Viewed from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework, change to any of the "interconnected, nested systems" (p. 8) that make up a life course ecology – the workplace, the school, the home,

the community, the social group, the political environment – can effect changes on the others. Immigration implies simultaneous and radical alteration of all of these spheres, and as such is an event of inherent instability.

More than any other sphere or microsystem, the home setting is one place in which the family – with the locus of control in the parents – can establish a beachhead of stability. Those who are able to settle into acceptable housing and to establish some semblance of normal familial routines and interrelationships, commonly with the assistance of relatives already established nearby, are best positioned for success. For those who fail, the outcomes are dire: Familial discord and fragmentation, especially in the urban enclaves where newcomers are most likely to settle, can contribute to disaffection and delinquency among immigrant children, as several participants reported having observed firsthand.

The influence of the home setting may be even more significant among Latinos than among other groups (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005). The academic resilience of Mexican-American students in particular has been seen to be strongly correlated with a family setting with low levels of conflict and an encouraging atmosphere (Alva, 1991).

Utility of Extended Family Network

All of the participants mentioned a significant degree of aid provided to their families during the immigration process by relatives already present in the U.S. This aid, which was concentrated mainly in the period immediately preceding and following migration, ranged from advice and connections to direct provision of housing, financial assistance, and employment.

The role of the extended family was especially important given that for many immigrants, as for most of the study participants, migration is a rather piecemeal endeavor: One parent precedes other family members, children are sent ahead or left behind, and so on. Only two of the participants specified that their families came as a single unit to the U.S., and in one of those cases this was preceded by a prolonged period of parental absence. The migration process would presumably be far less attractive if suitable caregivers, such as trusted relatives, were not available. (In one case, the participant's "relative" was specified to be a fictive one, though the familial title was still used.) The range of variations on this theme are such that to fully catalog them here would be more cumbersome than the benefit of such a list would warrant; however, in the succeeding sections some specific instances are described.

De-emphasis on Extended Family

Participants described their pre-migration living situations in terms of close-knit family relationships and typically of large numbers of relatives living in close proximity. And for most, the post-migration period was marked by a loss of daily contact with the extended family and as a consequence the immediate or nuclear family grew in significance. This was not universal in the sample, however, and it was in most cases a question of degree only, since as described in the preceding section, most participants had relatives who were already established in the new setting.

Roxana framed her account as a comparison between pre- and post-migration in which she makes clear her sense of loss:

I had a lot of benefits over there that I didn't have here. Especially because the family, I think the family supports you a lot, encourages you a lot. Here I have only like two cousins that are my age, but over there I have a lot of cousins. It was just like a good environment with my cousins and my aunts. We had a good relationship and you come here and then you really don't spend a lot of time with your family like you used to do over there. Because here you work, you don't have time.

Carmen presented a very comparable picture, expressing a similar sense of loss:

Over there, everybody is entangled in everybody else's life. They all live really close together, so it's not that difficult to just go next door and talk to grandma. Here, even with friends, everybody communicates through Facebook or text messages, I have maybe two phone conversations a day. Maybe. Everything else is text messages. Over there, everything is person-to-person. It's a very personal culture. Here it's more like, removed.

Xochitl echoed both Roxana and Carmen in describing her early life – “My whole family is over there in Mexico. We used to live very close to my grandma, my aunts.... We're a very united family, I come from a very united family” – but regarding the present she strove to present a positive perspective as well: “Even now, here, that it's only the five of us, in my house, we're always just very united.”

Jose characterized this aspect of his childhood by stating, “Back then we used to have a lot more family gatherings,” while affirming that today he saw little use for such things and usually followed a path of avoidance, acquiescing only at the request of his parents: “They actually made me go to my uncle's wedding. I didn't want to, but that one I was forced to. I even went to church. To my mother's delight.”

Daniel also saw that his life in the U.S. involved less contact with extended family, but he found this to be beneficial in at least one way. He described how his situation here differed from that of his older sister, who before the family migrated was pressured to take time from her studies for family obligations:

When she was studying in Mexico, yeah, they have more issues, like, “Yeah I have to go to the baptism, blah blah blah,” but since we’re here, I don’t feel like we have so much social life, it’s not like a big issue.

The distance between the family and relatives back home can be especially pronounced for undocumented immigrants, for whom the break between past and present lives is often much sharper than for those who can travel freely to visit relatives back home. For those unable to travel, the geographic distance between them and their families is intensified by the distance of time. This theme is pursued further in Chapter Eight.

Immigration and Family Re-unification

Though migration often represents a loss of connection to extended family structures, it can also bring about a re-joining of families fragmented by partial migration. (See “Parental Absence, Internal Migration, and Family Separation” earlier in this chapter.) As stated above, migration can be a multi-stage process, and this is especially true among those with limited resources. In a typical case, Ofelia’s father was living in the U.S. and brought family members as his circumstances permitted: First Ofelia’s sister joined him, then her grandmother, and finally she and her mother came north.

In some instances family re-unification itself was the impetus behind migration. Xochitl’s story is an example; after describing how her father lived for years in the U.S., coming back to Mexico only for visits, she explained:

It just got to the point where my mom was like, “You know what, we can’t be doing this. It’s either we, the whole family goes with you, or you come back.” And he was like, “Well there’s no way I can come back now.” Because things were hard moneywise, financially. [...] And my mom was like, “Are you coming back?” And he’s like, “You know what, I’m gonna bring you guys to the United States, because I think my kids would have a better life there.”

Once he had become an established wage-earner in the U.S., Xochitl’s father did

not see returning to a much weaker economic situation in Mexico as a viable option; their migration was the only way to re-unite his family.

Marta described how in her family's case, even though her father was in Mexico, he traveled so much for his job that his presence in the life of the family was negligible until they migrated: "Coming here on the other hand, it was very different cause he had a set job from eight to five and then he would be home for dinner and then we would interact much more."

In many cases, migration involves the bittersweet experience of reuniting with some family members while separating from others. In all cases, migration brought about separation from extended family networks; however, separations also occurred within the immediate family. Lidia and her sister did not begin living with their mother until Lidia was nine years old, and rejoining their mother came at the cost of separating from their father and grandmother. Carmen's father returned to Mexico after finding it impossible to adapt to the U.S. setting. For Andres and Geraldo, reuniting with some family members signified separating from others for an extended period. The two brothers were sent to stay with relatives in the U.S., which separated them from their parents but reunited them with an older sister who had preceded them.

Power Shifts within the Family

One result of bringing a long-separated family back together via immigration is that not only must the newcomers cope with the new surroundings, culture, and language, the entire family must face the task of adapting to an altered family structure. Participants invariably described this task as challenging, though in most cases it was ultimately met

with success. Shifts in power relationships can occur due to new arrangements and new influences resulting from immigration, as well as due to internal changes within individual family members as they are influenced by the new environment. These changes can be advantageous or not, and whether they are advantageous often depends on one's perspective and one's gender.

Veronica's family provides an example. After suffering from years of what Veronica described as an extremely abusive relationship, her mother gained some respite when they came to live in the U.S., where her mother's father had settled earlier: "When we got here, my dad was scared of my granddad, that was the problem. So for him, he wasn't able to tell my mom anything anymore, he wasn't able to hit my mom anymore."

A marked gender shift in power was also evident in Carmen's family, which shows how positive development for one family member can be accompanied by a less favorable outcome for another:

My mom became, in Mexico she was very, not submissive but very like naïve and quiet and very ladylike and such. But when we came here she was kind of forced to step up and take the role of husband and wife, because my dad was working all the time, so she was the caretaker and the disciplinarian as well. So I think she grew a lot, she grew a lot stronger from experience than I think she would have been if she had stayed in Mexico. I remember my mom how she was before and it's day and night. I prefer the way she is now. I think she's a very strong woman, and I don't think she would have become that way if she had stayed in Mexico. And then the opposite goes for my father, because here he just crumbled under the pressure, he couldn't take it, at all, and he left. Having so much work, and not having any family. He has eleven brothers and sisters there and nobody here.

It is hard to imagine a more succinct depiction of the disparity in how individuals can respond to the pressures of migration.

In Carmen's story, as in Veronica's, the net loser in the migration lottery was the

father, a rather common occurrence. Adult males typically incur the greatest cost in status on immigrating, as whatever training or professional level they achieved in the old country is likely to be of reduced or no value in the new. In childhood immigrant Mawi Asgedom's (2001) autobiography, he describes in harrowing detail his father's gradual dissolution after immigrating from Africa, where he was a highly respected medical technician, and coming to the U.S., where he had difficulty holding a job as a janitor. Women, on the other hand, commonly find in the U.S. empowering opportunities which did not previously exist, as in the case of Carmen's mother (who also went on to further her education in the U.S.). Not surprisingly, research on newcomers to the U.S. has affirmed that in general "immigrant women are more likely than their husbands to feel content with their new situations and are less likely to say that they wish to return to their homeland" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p.78, citing Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

In other instances, the shifting of power can be less clear-cut and with less dramatic results. Nadia provided an example of the complexity of this question:

Now, when we had to ask for permission, it was not under my mom, it was my dad. And the funny thing was, he wanted to spend more time with my brother and me, because he lost time, and he wanted to get the time back. And we didn't want to go with him, just wanted to go with friends, and he used to get mad. And when it was his day off, it was just a fight in the house. He wanted to get to know us a little more, but we wanted to go out. And my mom used to say, "Well look, you just lost the time, whatever time you spent working, I got the chance to be with them. And now that they got older you want to get the time back? That just can't happen."

This description is interesting in that while at the start Nadia suggests that power has shifted to her father, by the end of the narrative it becomes clear that this is mostly

illusion, and her mother has to a large degree retained the authoritative voice that had become habit during her years as a single parent.

Migration as Support/Threat to Family Unity

As discussed under “De-emphasis on Extended Family” above, nearly all participants spoke at various points about the unity of their families, with Xochitl’s statement “We’re a very united family” being typical of this. In general the participants in this study may represent the more fortunate face of migration as regards its effects on families, as certainly the stresses of adaptation can push families toward dis-unity as well – a tendency which several participants reported observing in others.

A common thread in all participants’ narratives was the theme of struggle and triumph over adversity, a manner of perceiving the immigrant experience which when it is shared by family members can enhance feelings of unity and foster a mutually supportive dynamic. Daniel provided the most explicit description of this, describing how he and his father tried to overcome the stresses they both faced shortly after immigrating:

My dad was having trouble at work, but he knew I was having trouble too, cause I was just learning another language, I was learning a new culture, so it wasn’t just like “Oh, you’re in Mexico, you can do all the things you’re used to doing.” So we comprehend each other. And that’s something that I don’t see the families usually do. And from my point of view, that’s just an excuse to say “Oh, we came here and my family just broke apart.” I think that’s just an excuse. I see some of the parents, they will focus on the beer, they will focus on the TV, to take out the pressure. And I was like, hmm, maybe that’s not the right way.

In this instance, family members were able to draw upon their shared struggle to find common ground. Earlier in this chapter failure is described as being “a very concrete possibility” in the worldviews of immigrants, and in this quote Daniel reveals this awareness by referring to other families, most likely neighbors and acquaintances, who

have chosen less productive coping mechanisms. This awareness was abundantly evident in the narrative data (and supported in this researcher's prolonged engagement with young people living in the communities in question): The dangers of immigrants choosing maladaptive coping strategies – specifically involvement in drugs and street gangs – are illustrated amply throughout the community.

Sometimes it is older siblings who provide examples of less successful attempts at adaptation. Lidia described how her troubled but seemingly self-aware older siblings held themselves up as negative role models: “They always said, ‘You know when you look at your life, look in a mirror, and see us and see yourself, which reflection do you want?’ So that was pretty much how they gave us the advice.”

Though Daniel generally described his home life as supportive, he too saw the strain of adapting as a threat to the family: “There was a pressure that we felt like, sometimes we wanted to explode.”

A common source of tension within a family under any circumstances is the nature of their accommodations. Overcrowding invariably breeds if not contempt at least tension, and for newcomers of limited financial means living in high-density urban neighborhoods, overcrowding is the norm. This can be especially trying when, as in Ofelia's story, the family is accustomed to more space:

When I came here, it was hard, because [in Mexico] I was living in a big house, nice [...]. And when I came, I was living in a basement, with just two rooms. And it was my two brothers, my mom, my dad, and my grandma. Five people. Also my dog.

Ofelia described the family going through a number of similar places, though this part of her story has a happy ending: After five years of living in such minimal spaces, the

family saved enough to purchase a house in a decent neighborhood.

Veronica related a similar account of her living circumstances, though with a less favorable outcome. She had moved out of her family's home due to ongoing space issues (as well as conflicts with her father), but later had to move back for financial reasons. At the time of the interview she reported living in a makeshift room which had been created in a corner of the basement – a basement which was also home to another entire family of recent-immigrant renters. Within the study sample, Veronica's case was perhaps unique in the duration of her tolerating such difficult living arrangements; housing as an ongoing problem did not arise as a major issue for other participants. (On the other hand, this was also not an issue specified in the interview protocol.)

Acculturation among family members, as well as simply adopting life and work patterns common in the new setting, can greatly affect how families interact, and when they move from a setting which supports high interaction to one which hinders interaction, the result can be a lessening of family unity. As Roxana said, "You come here and then you really don't spend a lot of time with your family like you used to do."

Nadia provided an example of this pattern, recalling how her family would spend their evenings in the past: "We used to eat together, like just wait for everyone to get to the table and eat and talk about how was your day, what's your plans and everything."

This changed as they adopted new, more Americanized habits:

We have, basically, different lifestyles, everyone is doing different things. Whenever we have time, we talk, but not at dinner. Now it's just us and the TV. In my country we used to just talk about whatever. Now with my mom it's TV and with me and my brother it's texting.

“We’re Going to Disney!”: Lying to Children about Migration

Author and mid-childhood immigrant Julia Alvarez (1998) describes how when she was a girl in the Dominican Republic, one day her aunts asked her if she would like to go to the United States for a “vacation.” She observed: “Something about the conversation seemed rehearsed. Some adult intrigue was afoot” (p. 16). Her childish suspicions proved correct; as she learned much later, the adults knew full well that the “vacation” was a convenient untruth. The family would soon leave the island forever.

Based on the stories told by participants in this study, Alvarez’s experience was typical. Though details varied somewhat, the majority of participants reported that (a) they were excluded from the decision-making process that resulted in migration, and (b) their parents and other adults misled them regarding the plan to migrate – usually in the form of a promise that the trip was merely “a vacation.” Apart from Alvarez, however, this phenomenon – especially the intentional deception of children regarding migration decisions – seems largely unremarked upon in migration research literature.

In telling this part of her story, Marta affected a jovial air, though her frequent laughter may have been partly an acknowledgment of (from her perspective as an adult) the absurdity of what she is recounting, or perhaps partly as a way of dealing with what must be painful memories:

It was actually a decision that I had no idea what was going on. My mom got a phone call at night and a cab picked us up and the next day we were in LA. [laughs] We left everything. Everything. I really haven’t asked what really happened or why was that decision made, but it was just from one, it was at night, we were already in our pajamas, and our mom said, “Get dressed, they’re coming to pick us up right now.” [laughs] She said we were going on vacation!

Marta later described the result of this secrecy and lack of forewarning: “I think it was

just harder because I didn't get to say goodbye to anyone." At another point in the interview, when asked what she felt was the most difficult part of her migration experience, she said:

The moving. Having to follow my parents. It was the biggest struggle. Everything else, you get used to. [...] They don't ask for your opinion, they make up their mind on their own... I think that was one of the most challenging, and the biggest struggle, having to follow, follow them anywhere they went.

Roxana's story followed remarkably similar lines:

It was not a plan that they never told me that "Oh, you know, we're gonna move and live over there." It was just a vacation [mimes quotation marks], for me. [...] I guess they didn't want to scare me, or they didn't wanna be like "Oh yeah, you're moving to another place." When you're ten you do see a lot of stuff, but you don't see, you just think you're just gonna go for a vacation. You're like "OK, I'm just gonna go for a vacation, I'm coming back." But now that I'm thinking, that I go back... They sold everything [...] everything was just like sold or given to people.

Like Marta's, Roxana's sense of being deceived is evident. Tellingly she tries to defend her younger self – "When you're ten you do see a lot of stuff" – but has to allow that she did not in fact discern her parents' lie. Roxana was one of several participants who reported feeling very unhappy at first about being forced to migrate, especially under false pretenses, though in retrospect she saw the obvious signs: "They sold everything."

Lidia's parents had divorced, and she and her sister were living in Honduras with their father and grandmother when their mother brought them to live with her in the U.S. Like many participants, she only learned the truth behind her experience long after: "It wasn't until later that I found out that, um, my dad didn't want to let us go," she recalled. "I've asked myself if I would've had the choice.... 'Cause nobody asked me if I wanted to come, it was told to me, you know?"

As with Roxana and Marta, Ellen's parents used the vacation story:

Oh yeah, well, they told me that we were going to the United States, to California, because we were going to Disneyland. [...] My grandmother, my mom's mom, she told her friends that I was moving to the United States, and when I was playing I heard her say that we were going to the United States, to move over there to live, and I was like, "That's not true, we're going to Disney!" And she's like, "Oh, yeah, you're going to Disney." But she started talking to them and she's like, "No, they're leaving, they're gonna stay there, to live." And I never asked my parents, "Is that true, that we're gonna stay there to live?" I was only thinking about Disney, Disney, Disney.

When asked if she ever did get to Disneyland, Ellen replied with a laugh: "No. Never."

Xochitl was among the few whose parents did talk to her about the planned move:

"My mom would say, 'What do you think?'" Although she was excited to see a new place and to be reunited with her father, once the reality of leaving began to sink in, she felt misgivings: "I just started kind of thinking more about the fact that I wouldn't be back. But I was only a child, so...." This last comment makes clear Xochitl's realization that as a child her feelings bore little weight, the same message that Ellen received from her grandmother's ironic, "Oh, yeah, you're going to Disney."

Echoing Xochitl's "but I was only a child," Gerardo characterized his experience this way:

We were initially coming for just a year, to learn the language.... Well, that was what they told me, initially. But then after that they kind of, well, I was only, what, ten or eleven years? So they didn't kind of consider what I wanted.

Gerardo continued by recognizing that, like Xochitl's parents, his parents had consulted with him and his brother about the move:

They asked us if we wanted to come. But we didn't know what the whole situation would be, so we decided, yeah, sure, we'll go. But then after a couple of months, maybe close to a year, that's when they started talking about staying longer.... But all along they knew that, that was part of their plan. So initially I

had told all of my friends [in Mexico] that I would be coming back, just only after a year, that I would go to the same school as them. At the beginning I saw it as a quick learning experience. But not a whole life-changing experience.

Like Xochitl, Gerardo makes clear that (a) his parents did ask his opinion, but (b) his parents withheld the information he needed to make an informed decision about what turned out to be “a whole life-changing experience,” and (c) he knows that as a child his opinion held little or no weight in any case.

Another participant whose parents made an ostensible attempt to involve her in the decision process, Carmen described a remarkably similar experience:

Well, my parents talked about it, not very often but a few times before they actually made the decision. And they asked me, because I was eight. My sister was too young, she was five. They asked me how I felt about coming here and I said, “I don’t know, I’m eight!” [laughs]

In all of these instances – Gerardo’s “I was only... ten or eleven,” Xochitl’s “But I was only a child,” Carmen’s “I don’t know, I’m eight!” and Ellen’s grandmother’s ironic, “Oh, yeah, you’re going to Disney” – the speakers assert their understanding that as children, they did not warrant an explanation, and that even when sought, their opinions were ultimately irrelevant.

Similarly, Marta’s story of her involuntary migration, repatriation, and re-migration (detailed under the heading “Changes in Behavior and Personality” above) leaves little doubt as to the feeling that her voice was of no consequence:

I had gotten used to the idea of being in one place and getting pulled out of it, and I think I just wanted to not get acquainted with anybody else but just myself and being alone, so that way it wouldn’t hurt that much when I would be, you know, taken out of the country or the school.

In addition to the deceptions made prior to migration, participants reported that

their parents in many instances seemingly misled them in regard to their plans to stay in the U.S. long after they had arrived. In many cases, the stated plan was to go back to the country of origin after a set period, usually between two and five years. It has also been observed that among immigrants to the U.S., “most people report that they intend to return home but over time many of these individuals become permanently settled” (Schiller, 1999, pp. 97-98); however, this research does not address the effects that such changed plans – whether a result of indirection, indecision, or evolving circumstances – have on immigrant children.

Daniel’s case is typical in that the original plan his parents put forward was to come to the U.S. for a set period and then return home: “First we just came here to study, and just, our plans were, ‘OK, we’re gonna go back to Mexico someday.’” These plans, he acknowledged, had been abandoned: “I think now it’s like more like ‘We’re gonna stay here for a little more and we might go back to Mexico.’ And we don’t know yet.”

In the case of Sara’s family, plans changed for unforeseen circumstances:

We were gonna come here for only two years, to be with my family, and then the plan was to go back. [...] After two years we were gonna go back to Mexico, we had everything, our plane ticket and everything. Then my parents at the time separated, so everything changed.

In contrast to others, however, Sara reported being satisfied with this turn of events: “I was happy, because I didn’t want to go back. And I needed to learn more English, and if I go back I’m just gonna forget it.” Francisco was similarly reluctant to attach any sense of offense at the change of plans, and in his story about this the event occurs almost as an act of god:

Summer vacation came and my sister and my mother and I wanted to come to visit, just summer vacation. At the end of the summer all four of us were gonna go back to our lives, but my parents actually... saw there was a better life here, more opportunities ... so we kinda just, never went back.

Especially in the case of undocumented immigrants, there may be a rationale behind conflicting stories and explanations. Roxana, for example, reported feeling that her parents had deceived her about their plans to go to the U.S. for a short visit, and that in retrospect she realized that they had sold or given away their possessions before leaving Mexico. However, elsewhere in her interview she stated that the reason her family had to stay in the U.S. was that her mother was in an automobile accident. This event does not explain why her parents got rid of their goods, yet at that point in the interview Roxana offered it without question, revealing perhaps a daughter's desire to accept the explanation at face value (even in the knowledge of disputing facts). On the other hand, this may simply be a kind of agreed-upon cover story – one containing a persuasive grain of truth – that Roxana is used to telling to explain why her family overstayed their visitor visas.

Discussion: “Over There” as Preparation for Immigrant Experience

One could make the case that the key experiences of the pre-immigration period – internal migration, parental absence, shifting power relationships, external cultural influences – provide individuals the opportunity to develop coping skills that will prove invaluable in overcoming the challenges they will face after migration. Perhaps most important is the sense of shared struggle and shared purpose which becomes established within the family as a result of pre-migration challenges. This period could almost be described as a sort of dress-rehearsal for the immigrant experience.

The migration event and its aftermath are a period of volatility and risk for families, creating pressures which can push individuals and families either toward beneficial and adaptive behaviors or toward conflict and dis-unity. In the narratives examined in this study, families seemed generally able to resist negative pressures or to use them productively, in part by insisting on a shared struggle narrative which supported both group unity and a sense of individual accomplishment. It is not surprising that in this sampling of “successful” students a marked characteristic of nearly all cases was the ability – against tremendous odds and often through a good amount of struggle, some arguably of their own making – to establish and maintain throughout the immigration process a stable home environment which served as a core microsystem and refuge for individuals, children and parents, facing great challenges. In Bronfenbrenner’s terms, they were able to preserve and even strengthen the family microsystem, which served as an essential bulwark within which the individuals could regroup and refresh to face the challenges beyond. Even in those instances where conflict and near-breakdown were evident (e.g., Veronica’s antipathy to her father, Carmen’s father’s inability to cope with the new setting, Daniel’s feelings of impending explosion, Lidia’s siblings’ behavioral problems), it seems the center ultimately held.

Discussion: The Puzzle of Low Academic Achievement

An open question remains as to why, if (as indicated almost unanimously in the study sample) their early academic preparation was more rigorous than that of their peers in the new setting, Latino immigrant students on the whole are seen to have far lower rates of academic achievement (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009). Three possibilities

suggest themselves:

First, the public schools that new Latino immigrants typically attend in the U.S. are overcrowded and underfunded (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005), and specifically the schools in the study community have been seen to perform quite unfavorably compared to all institutions statewide (ISBE, 2008), probably due in part to extreme disparities in public education funding in the state (Orfield & Gaebler, 1991).

A second possibility is that being placed into a much lower-demand environment at an impressionable age can have the effect of supporting or inculcating counterproductive study habits – if one is so far ahead of his peers that he simply does not need to do homework to keep up, and if this condition is extended across a period of years, the end result may be diminished capacity (or taste) for scholarship. (This hypothesis would be strongly supported based on my own case, having moved from an academically rigorous Midwestern parochial school to a public school in the Southwest in which pupils in the sixth grade were struggling with material I had mastered *years* earlier.)

Another explanation is simply that the individuals interviewed in this study – having been selected on the basis of their relatively high academic achievement – attended uncommonly rigorous schools in their home countries. My own long involvement in educating immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America has provided me extensive experience of hearing those students compare schools in the U.S. unfavorably with schools “over there,” though it must also be observed that my contact with this population has occurred mainly in postsecondary settings, which like the

academic success criterion in this study skews the sampling toward higher achievers. This sampling effect would help to explain not only the perspectives on U.S. versus Mexican schools outlined in this chapter, but also why these students were able to reach higher levels of academic success in later years.

In the following chapter, those later years – the participants’ experiences in college – are considered. This was found to be a period of continuing adaptation and consolidation. With the traumatic upheavals of arrival behind them, and in spite of ongoing challenges, most participants came to enjoy greater comfort in and to feel more connected to their new surroundings, and to express greater autonomy in their interactions with their new world.

CHAPTER SIX

COLLEGE YEARS: INCORPORATION AND AUTONOMY

You can manage your life and your time as you want. It's up to you what you do, and you can study what you want. You can really have your own life. You can decide whatever you want. (Sara, on being a college student)

Going to college is often the first major life decision young people make, after a childhood of being subject to decisions made for them, usually by their parents. And as seen in the previous chapter, in the case of many mid-childhood immigrants, some of the decisions which most affected them up to that point – decisions that some perceived at the time as being counter to their best interests – were made with neither their honest counsel nor consent. As Marta said, “They don’t ask for your opinion.”

This is not to say that the decision to attend college is a student’s alone; parents commonly play a significant role, and for nearly all of the participants interviewed for this study, parental and family influence were implicated strongly not only in the processes of deciding and preparing to attend college, but also in the provision of support (material, intellectual, and emotional) and the encouragement of behaviors favorable to academic success.

Nonetheless, succeeding in college is ultimately an individual choice. As many postsecondary educators can attest, young people who truly do not have an interest in school will express this indifference regardless of their enrollment status or the books in their backpacks. The individuality of this choice may have a particular resonance for mid-

childhood immigrants. Unlike their migration, a transformative choice which was imposed upon them by their parents and life circumstances (and unlike their K-12 education, which was imposed upon them by legal and social norms), their pursuit of higher education is in a very real sense an autonomous act: If they reject the idea, no one can make them do it.

Deciding and Planning to Pursue Higher Education

In the beginning I wanted to go back to my country. Because I was confident over there, I knew what step to go after high school, where to go to college and everything. And over here it's totally different, just starting blank, just a new page, open a new page and start from the beginning. (Nadia)

Compared to native-born students (including native-born Latinos), immigrants from Latin America are much less likely to plan on attending college. According to a recent study, while native-born Latino students aged 16 to 25 claimed to have plans to go to college at the same rate as all students, 60%, fewer than half as many foreign-born students, 29%, professed to have such plans (Lopez, 2009).

Does the lack of stating an intent to attend college translate into reality? In several studies it is just this variable – labeled variously as educational aspirations, intent to persist, commitment to academic goals, or goal articulation – which has consistently been seen as significant and predictive of persistence (Bernard, 1993; Camburn, 1990; Heath, 1996; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Solis, 1995; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000). And census data bear this out, indicating that foreign-born Latinos aged 18 to 24 are half as likely to be enrolled in school than native-born Latinos, 40% as opposed to 20% (Kewal Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007).

Participants interviewed for this study included nuanced accounts of their college

planning, recalling how and when they formed their earliest notions of going to college (before high school, in most cases), describing how and where and from whom they obtained advice and practical information about college, and characterizing the influences on their planning process.

Prevalence of Early Goal-setting

Overall, these participants' experiences with goal-setting align with studies (such as those cited in the previous section) which indicate that successful students approach college with forethought, stated goals, and strong intentions to persist. Two-thirds of the participants claimed that they began thinking about college during elementary school or earlier; in some cases the timeline given was "since I can remember" or "always." Lidia reported that her plans began early: "Since I was little.... I always thought that I would end up going to college or university." Jose described his college planning timeline similarly: "I kind of grew up with that idea, that I'm gonna be something, I'm gonna be someone." Regarding his intent to get an advanced degree, Gerardo stated: "I think I always thought about it. That was always my goal." Andres, Gerardo's brother, was more specific: "We always thought we wanted to go to college... that was the plan. I was thinking I was gonna do it even before I went to high school, when I was in elementary school."

Participants spoke of having concrete academic objectives and made it clear that they were aware of what was required and where they stood in the path to completion. Regarding her college planning, Marta said: "My goal since I can remember is to be a teacher. So I'm almost getting there, I'm halfway there." Marta reveals here not only how

far back her plans go, but also her specific goal and how close she is to it. She went on to speak about the motivational value of having an objective: “My goal, that’s the whole, the only thing that right now is motivating me. Because sometimes I could get caught up in so many things, but wanting to reach that goal is what motivates me the most.”

Jose described his own goal and motivation:

As my teacher, as one of my other mentors at school said, “You need that Ph.D. after your name.” It’s what drives you. And I wanna have that respect, I wanna be somebody else... I wanna exploit that potential and not just leave it there as potential, but I wanna use it. And I do want that Ph.D. at the end of my name.

Another participant with plans extending far beyond a bachelor’s degree is

Gerardo:

I don’t mind the idea of being in school when I’m 30, when I’m married. I’m gonna try to go to grad school, do a Ph.D. in a different country maybe. ... I don’t have a limit to my goal. If I keep studying for the next five, ten, fifteen years, I don’t mind at all.

Veronica put her early goal-setting into action at a fairly early point in her high school career. Long-accustomed to pulling her own bootstraps, she refused to wait for others to provide her with information:

In freshman [year] they tell you, “Well, let’s start thinking about what you want to do when you grow up.” And I’m like, “I’m already done! I did this already a long time ago, kiddo!” I’m not gonna take my time, I’m already thinking. By then I was thinking what am I gonna do about scholarships, what am I gonna do about this. By my freshman year I had already gone to [university X], I had already gone to [university Y], to [university Z]. I had gone to all these colleges to go check them out. And by my own instance, not by anybody else.

Motivational Value of Family Struggle

As reflected in the interview data, perhaps the most significant way in which

immigrant parents influence their children's academic efforts is indirectly, by serving as a motivation. Participants spoke of the desire to make their parents and families proud of them – an incentive which is especially strong in the cases where higher education is not the family norm – but the motivation went beyond just pride: They wanted to validate their family's struggle and sacrifice as immigrants. This aligns with the finding of Baca, Bryan and McKinney (1993) that immigrants arriving during later childhood were inspired by their awareness of “the hardships their families faced in coming to the United States” (p. 37).

A strongly consensual perspective emerged of the family as engaged together in a struggle against considerable odds. In Chapter Five, this perspective was explored as a unifying influence on the family; here the same perspective is revealed to have a powerful motivational value as well.

Carmen described her very clear sense of what her parents gave up:

I think I'm able to share in what my parents went through to get us here, and I realize that ultimately they did that for us, not for them. They sacrificed it all: Their family, their friends, their life. Their education. My dad left college when we came here. So I think that ultimately it's made me more aware of the actions that I take today and the effect that they have on my parents. Like if I do, if I fail a class here or something, I know my mom is disappointed because I'm here for an education. Things like that. I feel like I have to maybe not, not live out their expectations, but work really hard to make something of myself so that their sacrifices weren't in vain. Or that they don't regret having done what they did. It's kind of a big pressure.

This brief but insightful excerpt covers an extraordinary amount of ground. Carmen begins by establishing her own stake, asserting that though young, she was old enough to understand and “share” in her parents' struggle. She shows a nuanced grasp of the enormity of what they gave up (“Their family, their friends, their life. Their education.”),

and why (“for us, not for them”). And she makes clear that this directly impacts her own attitudes and behaviors (“it’s made me more aware of the actions that I take today”). She makes a distinction between living out her parents’ expectations and ensuring that “that their sacrifices weren’t in vain.” And she finishes in the confessional mode, at which point her tone and diction shift from the earlier, rather dry and “adult” voice, to the child’s simple lament: “It’s kind of a big pressure.”

Francisco revealed a similarly nuanced perspective on how his parents’ sacrifice affected him:

It’s not like I’m being forced, but obviously I see the way they struggled and I want to go to college, finish college, so I can help them out, and kind of repay them. That’s what pushed me throughout my childhood.

Nadia also described feeling “pushed” by her parents’ sacrifice:

The one that sacrificed the most was my mom. The way she said it, “I came here to give you a better future for you guys, I had to leave my future. Because I left my life, because I want you to have a better future.” So that’s pushing us, to go and be someone in life.

Wanting to “kind of repay” parents (as Francisco says) for their struggles can be a strong motivator, as seen in Roxana’s imagining the day of her graduation:

I wanna give my parents that satisfaction to be like, “Oh well she did all it took, and she’s here because of us and she’s here because she was fighting for it. And it took her time, but look, now I’m proud of her.” That’s the feeling that I wanna have when I finish, when I graduate from college. Just to give them the paper and say, “You know what, here’s my diploma.”

Participants also made clear that they did not romanticize their parents’ struggles. Indeed, the memories of sacrifices are viscerally felt, and most indicated that they were motivated by a strong aversion to the idea of facing the kind of struggles their parents did. Marta explained her biggest motivation:

The struggle that my parents went through. I saw my dad really struggling with work... to bring money home and pay the rent and... try to catch up with having to pay certain things. And I think that made it a little bit more clear to me that it's so important for somebody to have a goal. I saw them struggling so much and I told myself that I would never want to be in that situation that we were when I got here. My dad only making it to third grade, my mom only making it to sixth grade, and for my dad it was very hard to get a job not having no school background. So I told myself that I never wanted to be in that situation.

Others offered strikingly similar perspectives:

I don't wanna end up like my parents, you know? They're like a perfect example.... I wanna have a good life, you know, when I grow up, I don't wanna be struggling financially, you know, always like, "Oh my god the bills," or "What are we gonna do?" You know, I don't wanna do that at all. I think that's what really motivates me to keep going and going. (Xochitl)

You know sometimes it's just, it's so heavy, I can't take it, but I'm like, "No, we're gonna go to school, we have to go to school, because if you don't wanna suffer through that anymore, you have to go to school, kiddo." (Veronica)

Family Role Modeling and Motivation

Further demonstrating the central importance of family in their lives, all participants mentioned the importance of role models – in regard to both themselves as role models and other family members whom they view as role models. Providing a positive example for younger siblings and relatives has been seen as significant among Latinos; Sarther (2006) found this to hold among Mexican American women college students.

Seeing oneself as a role model can have a motivating effect. In some cases, participants had the distinction of being the first in their families (sometimes the first in their extended families) to attend college (sometimes even to finish high school), and as such they found themselves in the glare of the family spotlight. They described this as implying a responsibility, one characterized not as a burden but as a positive influence.

Explaining what motivates him to succeed at college, Jose stated:

Well ... I'd be the first one in my family that's ever done it. And I, I'd set a good example to my little cousins. I'm the oldest one, so it'd be a nice example. If I did it, there's no reason why you shouldn't.

Lidia, meanwhile, saw a difference in the value of merely giving advice to younger family members and providing a concrete example:

I have nieces. And you know, I wanna be able to say, I want you to accomplish what I did. Maybe not in the same way, you know, but if you go for your dream, I want you to do it, the way I did. Not just advice, but to say, If I did it, you could do it.

Just as they perceived themselves as role models for their younger family members' educational pursuits, the participants viewed elder family members as role models. In some cases, these were positive role models, as when Gerardo described how his mother, who had years before exited from a dentistry program in Mexico only two semesters before finishing, was now attending seminars and attempting to extend her learning: "I think that's kind of a motivation for us, too, seeing our parents pursuing their dreams too, their goals." Since arriving in the U.S., Carmen's mother had completed a GED and gone on to obtain a medical career certificate, accomplishments which Carmen termed "an inspiration" for her in her own studies.

In the great majority of cases, however, parents' experiences in regard to education and career achievement were perceived by participants mainly as negative role models. Often, the parents themselves were described as encouraging this perception. The flip-side of being motivated by parents' struggles is seeing that experience as undesirable, which presents a kind of immigrant's paradox: I love and honor my parents for what they have sacrificed, but will do everything possible not to be like them.

As outlined in the section “Motivational Value of Family Struggle” above, the first step is being aware of what parents’ have given up. Veronica, for example, recalled her own direct (though unintentional) role in this sacrifice: “My mom wanted to keep on studying, she wanted to go into history and journalism and stuff like that but she never was able to ‘cause she was pregnant from me.”

Ellen, too, described her mother’s situation as opposite of what she hoped for:

I don’t want to be like my mom right now that has children and she’s at home and just taking care of her family. I want to be different, I want to be independent and not depend on my husband. Now I’m not pregnant, I don’t have children, and I’m in college and I want to be different from the rest of my family.

Xochitl’s mother’s hopes for education were dashed by similar expectations: “My mom was gonna become a nurse in Mexico, but she got married.”

Nadia’s father was working in a restaurant, and she described being motivated by her awareness of the limits that his circumstances had imposed upon him: “He’s not dumb, he’s smart. But he didn’t have the opportunity to go, to have a real career. If he would have the opportunity, I guess he would have a good job.”

Participants described how their parents themselves sometimes encouraged them to use the parents’ lack of academic accomplishments as a motivation for their own.

Xochitl described her father’s exhortation in this regard:

“You keep going, keep going, and that’s good. Keep it up. I don’t want you to be like us, in the same situation. You gotta be better than us.” I think that’s what has really motivated me.

Like Nadia’s father, the necessity of many immigrant parents to take low-skill and menial employment regardless of their background in the home country was evident in the interviews. Jose and Francisco described their fathers holding up themselves as

cautionary examples:

My dad would keep on telling me, “You don’t wanna do construction work, you’re gonna get killed. And you’re not gonna last a long time, it’s a lot of hard work. So I’d really rather you go to school and use your brain, not your muscles.” So I grew up with that image, that idea in my head. (Jose)

My dad’s always telling me, “You have to go to school, better yourself, without an education you can’t really do anything, you’re gonna be working like a donkey, like me, at a factory, getting minimum wage, no benefits, busting your rear end just to pay the bills....” Because I see them struggling, and I want to make sure that my parents have enough and don’t kill themselves as they grow older.... I figure I’ll be successful and have a good income so they don’t work themselves off as they get older. (Francisco)

As seen in other instances, Sara presented a somewhat puzzling exception, asserting that her parents’ complete lack of interest in her educational plans was in itself a motivation: “My parents they didn’t push me to do anything like sports, school, like nothing at all. They didn’t pay attention to me, basically. And that was like another motivation.” When asked to explain this, Sara offered little except to agree that it was hard to understand, even for her. Certainly she provides an example of resilience, as defined by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) as the capacity to “sustain high levels of achievement and motivation and performance, despite environmental adversities” (p. 46).

Aside from parents, siblings or other family members can provide negative role models. In the previous chapter, Lidia’s troubled older siblings were mentioned as actively presenting themselves as negative role models for adaptation (“When you look at your life, look in a mirror, and see us and see yourself, which reflection do you want?”), but also for educational aspirations:

My brothers and my sisters, they’ll say, “I, you know, I ended up being bad. [...] You could be whatever you wanna be. [...] We’re not, um, we’re not educated as

much as you are, but it's not because we didn't want to, it's because of the circumstances that we had here."

As in this example, family comparisons were often made specific to educational aspirations. Sara stated: "I have four siblings, and none of them finished high school, and that was my motivation to finish high school and go to continue my education." Ellen also expressed the hope that she could make a departure from her family's pattern:

It's my dream to become someone different from the rest of my family, who has done nothing, they haven't studied, they're just working, forty hours a week and just pay the bills, and live the routine. I want to be different.

Francisco related (and later referred back to on more than one occasion) a story which points out the motivational value of a seemingly minor family incident. He described a scene in which, not long after their arrival in the U.S., he and his sister were watching a movie in English with their native-born cousins. Someone in the film made a joke that the newcomers did not understand.

So my sister and I just sort of laughed along with the crowd. And one of my cousins made a comment like "Why are you laughing? You don't even know what they're saying." And I think that's the point where it kind of got me mad, and it kind of pushed me towards learning, faster. And even to this day, I'm kind of better educated than she is, than my cousin, so I guess that kind of pushed me to want to be better than her, and everyone there. It was just like, I want to be better than you guys. And I think for the most part, I am.

Francisco's story demonstrates the motivational value of lower-achieving relatives when combined with a perceived slight from the same.

It should be noted here again that although participants held up their parents and other family members as negative or cautionary role models in regard to academic and career pursuits, the large majority of participants also repeatedly affirmed their families and most significantly their parents as strongly positive factors in their lives, providing

essential encouragement, stability, and support.

Influence of Community Members

In addition to family members, participants described others in their own community as influencing their life choices. However, in contrast to the mixed messages received from family role models, others in the community were cited almost exclusively as providing examples of life choices which participants perceived as undesirable and which therefore motivated them to make different choices. Given that the community is comprised very predominantly of a Latino and specifically Mexican population, these comments revealed implied (and in some cases explicit) attitudes toward not only the community but the participants' co-ethnics residing there.

Carmen offered a description of a life course that she observed in school peers, and one that she intended to avoid:

I didn't want to be stuck like everyone else in the community. So it made me more driven to learn and get away from there. You know, like girls out of high school, just straight into marriage or straight into motherhood, and not really anything in between. I did not want that. I was like, that's not for me, I need to move away from that. I mean, I love this area and I love the community and whatever, but I'm not gonna be here my whole life. I'm gonna get out of there.

After stating unequivocally her rejection of the life pattern she describes, Carmen is careful to profess her "love" for her community, though she follows this with the ubiquitous and dismissive "whatever."

Andres, whose goal is to become an architect, described his perception that even among those in his community who did aspire to go to college, many had a limited sense of their possibilities:

I think they have a hard time to believe that they can do something besides just high school, and you know, “I just wanna be a nurse, and a PE teacher,” Something not as difficult. They don’t say, “Oh, I want to be a doctor. I want to be a lawyer, I want to do something more.” So I guess, I don’t feel really attached to those ideas, with that background.

Sara expressed her desire to “break” negative stereotypes that she believes people of her background hold about themselves: “The people around me, they didn’t go to school, and they were part of the stereotype that Mexicans are ignorant and Mexicans are this, dahdahdah. And that gave me a push to break that stereotype.”

Scarcity of Information and Expertise for College Planning

Choosing a college or university and making the preparations necessary for admission and enrollment can be a profoundly complex process in the U.S. (as in most places), one which (whether by design or not) strongly favors students with reliable sources of information and advice such as knowledgeable family members, relatives, high school counselors, and other mentors.

Mid-childhood immigrants have been characterized as suffering from the absence of “a family history of academic participation [and] strong social networks in post-secondary education” (Preto-Bay, 2003, p.112), combined circumstances which are not likely to enhance their efforts to effectively plan and execute strategies for pursuing higher education. These circumstances – a scarcity of knowledgeable mentors and an abundance of underperforming schools – were amply evidenced in the narrative data collected in this study. Participants’ perspectives on the academic quality of local schools were presented in Chapter Five, while in this section the focus is on those individuals who they see as able to provide mentoring for college planning and preparation.

Parental Experience and Knowledge of Higher Education

Overall, parental postsecondary achievement was reported as very limited. Although roughly a third of the participants asserted that one or both parents had completed some higher education, in several cases, parental educational aspirations were cut short, such as the cases of Xochitl's, Carmen's, and Veronica's mothers (as described previously) as well as Andres and Gerardo's parents. However, even a limited amount of parental postsecondary experience was seen as supportive of participants' own efforts in navigating the path to college.

Most participants reported having little or no access to knowledge about higher education. Jose described his experience: "We didn't know anyone that had gone to college. We didn't have any idea. So it was just practically me walking in the dark. It was awkward..." Francisco concurred: "When I was in high school, I guess because I was the first generation of my family to go to school here, like college, I didn't really know how to go about finding the right college." Carmen told a similar tale: "I always knew I wanted to come to college, but I was really afraid of the transition because my parents didn't go to college here."

Marta's parents had very limited education, with her mother attending school only until sixth grade and her father through third grade, due to family obligations. Even though she knew of her parents' lack of knowledge about education – "My parents really didn't know what school really was" – Marta described her surprise at their reaction when she graduated from high school:

I was the first one graduating high school in my family, and it was something really big for them. And uh, it was a bit of a surprise to me, choosing not to go to college and them not pushing me a little to do it? Cause it was like “Oh, you graduated high school, that’s great!” but they really didn’t have in mind a career that I would want to pursue.

Even those participants who had certain apparent advantages mentioned feeling the lack of support from their parents. Xochitl’s attendance at a selective high school meant that she had ample advising at school, but this did not make her less aware of her parents’ lack of knowledge on the subject of education:

They’re always kind of like, me or my brother if, like for college or even for high school, we were on our own, ‘cause they were, they try to be there, but they didn’t know what to do. No one told them, “OK, well, you have to do this and this and this.” So they didn’t know.

Ellen, too, presented an ambiguous case. Her father had attained a bachelor’s degree in Mexico, which she characterized as influencing her own college plans. However, her father was apparently not familiar with the U.S. system, as evidenced by Ellen’s description:

Well, my dad he went to the university, he got a bachelor’s degree in Mexico [...] so he was expecting a lot of me, that I would go to college. And my senior year, when everyone started to fill out their applications and so on, I was thinking, “I’m not gonna go to college, I don’t have the money for it.” I was confused about it. But then at the end of the year, my dad asked “Are you going to college, have you applied to any universities?” And I was like, “No.”

Whether her father’s waiting until the end of her senior year to ask about her college plans was due to his lack of knowledge about the system or simple inattention is not clear, but in either instance he was of limited value as a mentor, and apparently no other individual came forward to fill the void.

A handful of exceptions to the general lack of parental contribution to college

planning were evident. Carmen mentioned the positive influence of her mother's pursuit in the U.S. of her GED and further education. Nadia's mother was a teacher back in Mexico, inspiring her plan (later changed) to study education. Daniel's parents had studied in Mexico, an experience he characterized as helping them understand the demands on him as a student.

In the case of the brothers Andres and Gerardo, their parents had both completed the better part of their studies toward a postsecondary degree in Mexico when they decided to leave school. Andres made the point that within his family, the intent to pursue a college education was not considered unusual. Although he was probably not directly familiar with enrollment statistics about the relatively low postsecondary participation of Latinos in the U.S. (Kewal Ramani et al., 2007; Lopez, 2009), Andres made it clear that he was aware of such perceptions, and compared them to attitudes in Mexico:

I guess here when you're like a minority, college and university, and having a bachelor's degree, seems more like something "Oh, Hispanics don't do that." When we were raised in Mexico, it was more like, yeah, you could do that, that's part of the plan, it was something not as different.

Gerardo spoke of the positive effect of having parents familiar with the challenges of being a college student: "It helps them to understand what we're going through, you know, when we have to wake up at five in the morning or stay late at night, or don't sleep at all... they're very supportive."

Availability of Mentors in High School

Although several participants spoke of how certain teachers and staff members in their schools had helped them to adjust and succeed in their new environment (as discussed in "Significance of Teachers and Other Mentors at School" in Chapter Five), in

very few instances did participants single out individuals in their high schools as being helpful to them in the area of college preparation. This is surely to some degree related to conditions at the high schools in the community which, typical of the “under-resourced, high-poverty schools” seen in urban immigrant gateway enclaves, suffer from large class sizes and extremely unfavorable staffing-student ratios (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005, p. 15). In Sara’s words: “The high school I went to was not a really good school. I don’t think they offer good academic quality.”

Though limited, there were some significant exceptions to this. Xochitl, who attended a selective, college-preparatory high school, was aware not only of what post-high school choices were most attractive but also, unfortunately, of the fact that her immigration status rendered them largely unattainable. Carmen credited an after-school “bridge” program offered by a non-profit organization in conjunction with her high school. Marta identified a high school English teacher who she said was instrumental in inspiring her to choose her college goals: “I think the biggest influence was my teacher, because he was so persistent with going to college and setting a goal for your life, setting a goal for your education, and I think that played a big part.” Jose also mentioned a teacher who recommended him for an advanced placement class: “I think he was a really good help. I really appreciate that he saw it in me, that he saw the potential in me.”

Aside from these examples, participants made little mention of significant school-based mentoring, which when it occurred was typically a single reference or comment, and in response to being specifically asked if someone “at school” had been helpful.

To some degree, the dearth of school-based assistance and information could be

due to the scarcity of counselors as well as a general attitude that certain students simply were not college material. Students like Xochitl, Marta, and Carmen worked hard to be noticed for their academic aptitude. Others were perhaps not as visible, and some felt that they were simply not expected to go beyond high school. Regarding the possibility of going to college, Veronica asserted: “Only one of my teachers was motivating. So once I came over here [to GCC] to pick my classes, I was like, ‘What am I doing?’”

Limited Influence of the Non-family Social Circle

The paucity of information and support in relation to higher education planning available to mid-childhood immigrants from family and public school resources does not seem likely to be offset by their social contacts. Minority and immigrant students have been seen to lack social networks which can provide knowledge to help them manage the intricacies of the educational system (Preto-Bay, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). A recent study of Latina college students found that their social relationships were grounded mainly within the immediate family with less emphasis on peer-group friendships (Sarther, 2006), a finding which is supported in the present study, whose participants reported little influence from non-family social networks. Among the participants, in fact, a marked characteristic during the first few years following their arrival in the U.S. seems to be a relatively weak non-family social network. Reasons varied, though language and culture seem implicated.

As discussed in “Changes in Behavior and Personality” in Chapter Five, a common experience reported by these mid-childhood immigrants is that their social

connections outside the family became severely curtailed, a process which reversed only gradually during the few years after arrival, until by the college years they do not mention particular concerns in this regard. Immediately upon arrival, however, participants described changing from outgoing and sociable to withdrawn and isolated, an experience which naturally is not recalled with fondness.

On the other hand, neither was the limited social network described in strongly negative terms; the tone was with few exceptions matter-of-fact. One reason for this may be the capacity of a strong family network to provide levels of interaction sufficient for emotional well-being. Another reason may be the (mostly) unconscious understanding that this lack of social contact in early days might have been instrumental in allowing the newcomers ample time to take stock of their new surroundings and make considered choices without the risk of unknown influences.

Rather than age-group peers, social contact was reported to be mostly limited to family members and adults such as teachers and counselors. This was affirmed most directly by Carmen, who having described her social circle as very limited (“I didn’t really have friends, I went to school and then I went home”) was asked if she felt this isolation helped her avoid “unhelpful peer pressure.” She responded, after a pause: “I think so. My group of, the people that I spoke with every day were mainly adults, so, yeah.”

When asked to talk about individuals who particularly influenced or motivated them in their academic pursuits, participants rarely mentioned friends. In fact, only one specified her friends as being strongly influential. Sara spoke of the “nerds” in her social

group: “I think they were a really good influence. Because I used to be all the time with the nerds. And I think they helped me focus.” However, Sara’s case was also unique in that she felt that her parents “didn’t pay attention” to her.

In other cases, mention of social peers was extremely limited. When mentioned, they were typically seen as undesirable, something best avoided or contradicted. Francisco offered a rather representative description, imagining what his behavior might have been if his parents had not provided a suitable alternative:

My parents have always been good parents, and my sister and I good kids. We’ve never, you know, roamed the streets all day. [...] I’m not saying it’s a certain thing, but I think I would’ve been hanging out with kids at school, like bad influences, or kind of just going out on the street and doing whatever I wanted.

Several participants spoke of behaviors of other members of their community which they perceived negatively, as discussed in “Influence of Community Members” above and treated further in “Individuation and Choice: Distinguishing Self from Other Immigrants” in Chapter Seven. Overall, the narrative data indicate that the influence of the social group, especially before the college years, was of rather limited significance. Whether this is at variance with the experience of non-immigrant students is not within the scope of this study to ascertain, though this does seem likely.

The College Experience

Two of the three research questions defining this inquiry focused on academic success – specifically seeking clarification regarding the “circumstances, characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, events” that these students perceive as most supportive of and most detrimental to their academic success. It would greatly simplify the researcher’s task if the narrative data had suggested a neat compendium of challenges and helps to academic

success in general. However, and alas, this was not to be. As has doubtless been apparent up to this point, the findings are multilayered and complex, with a good deal of overlap and more than a smattering of contradiction and ambiguity to take into account.

However, the data related specifically to the college setting as these mid-childhood immigrants experienced it constituted an exception to this intricacy: Participants focused on a set of defined particulars and spoke of them in relatively unambiguous terms.

Confidence in Academic Abilities

Regarding specifically the experience of taking and passing classes at college, the participants expressed few concerns or misgivings. As has been noted elsewhere, this is possibly an effect of the sample criterion limiting the group to those who have completed a full semester's worth of transferable courses, thus presumably eliminating weaker students. On the other hand, neither could this one-semester criterion be characterized as a towering hurdle.

Many participants reported having taken advanced placement courses in high school, being on honor rolls or receiving other kinds of recognition for their academic achievement. Even so, most found their middle and high school experiences to be singularly lacking in challenges, as was explored in Chapter Five.

The general impression one gleaned from talking with these participants was a comfortable confidence in their academic abilities. Jose stated directly an assertion that seemed shared by many of his peers in the study: "My self-esteem comes from my, from me knowing that I have a good mind." Francisco spoke in similar terms: "I think I'm

pretty intelligent guy... so it's like, I can do it." This was echoed by Gerardo, if somewhat more indirectly: "I guess I never had a problem with the content, the material of the classes for the most part."

Daniel was equally unequivocal in speaking about how he perceived the academic challenges of college:

Honestly it's really easy. For me, it's like... easy. I think the classes and my schedule, all the activities I'm involved at school, all these clubs, and I have a really busy schedule, and I still have time to do good in my classes, and I work too, during the week.

Similarly, when asked to speak about her "biggest challenge academically," Carmen replied: "Academically? ... Actually, I don't think that I have any. I mean, that's not arrogance or anything, but... I am doing very well in my classes, I don't have any other problems. I had a lot of preparation." In contrast to her above-quoted counterparts (all male, interestingly), Carmen chooses to attribute her success not to her possession of a presumably god-given "good mind" (which she clearly does possess) but rather to "a lot of preparation." Carmen felt that she had received valuable academic preparation prior to college via a bridge program, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Other participants – nearly all – professed to "like" or even "love" school and learning in general, and similar sentiments were expressed about more specific related activities as reading and writing. Sara characterized her attitude toward school as matching her natural preferences: "I like to try new things, to learn, and I was like, I have to try something else. I have to try college. I like reading, I like learning. And that was motivation for me." Francisco reported, similarly: "I wanted to learn. [...] All through high school, I had good grades, my ACT score was pretty good."

Some participants viewed English as an ongoing challenge at college, though it was described not as a worrisome or insurmountable hurdle but simply as an area necessitating more effort. Gerardo described classes requiring a lot of writing or oral presentations: “Those were the challenging ones, and those I had to really spend time working on.”

Many participants referred to the difficulty of college, making statements like Xochitl’s assertion: “College is not an easy thing, but if you want it you really have to work hard at it.” However, in nearly all such cases the difficulty was in the context of not academics but other pressures from outside the college setting, such as too many demands on time and too little money. In Xochitl’s case, as in the case of the other undocumented participants, among her greatest challenges was finding a way to pay for school.

Overall, and speaking from the perspective of an instructor with two decades of community college and university experience, I can describe the participants as uncommonly well acquainted with the concepts and issues salient to college success. They were articulate in describing their experiences and circumstances, and though they spoke of various challenges and uncertainties (as indicated throughout these findings), they expressed confidence in their abilities. To some extent this may be a kind of bravado which they have found a useful complement to their other academic strategies. As most are still in the early stages of their college careers, the jury remains out as to how consistently their professed academic skills will manifest, or to what effect. However, as mentioned above, all made reference to specific accomplishments in support of their

claims of academic prowess. In many cases, they described specific and apparently realistic academic plans extending well beyond two- or even four-year degrees.

Attitudes Toward Community College

Participants' perspectives on the value of attending a community college were as varied as the literature on the subject (as reviewed in Chapter Two), with some finding it a remarkable opportunity, some unenthusiastic but appreciative of it for practical reasons, and others viewing it as an undesirable choice made necessary by unfortunate circumstances.

Individuals' attitudes toward the community college seemed, predictably enough, to depend to a large degree on their initial aspirations for postsecondary education. Those who had access to information about college selection typically set their sights on four-year institutions. Where this was the case, the choice or necessity to attend a community college was viewed with little enthusiasm.

After attending a selective high school known for its high percentage of university placements, Xochitl found herself in the position of having no choice but to opt for the community college option:

Most of my friends went to universities right after high school. [...] I'm like, "Well I'm going to a community college," and they're like, "But why? But why?" You know, and I'm like, well I don't qualify for financial aid.

Xochitl's admission that she does not qualify for financial aid revealed the likelihood that she lacked legal immigration documentation needed to secure federally guaranteed funding, a status which she confirmed and discussed in detail during the interview. (Her experience of being undocumented, and the experiences of others who reported this

status, are the focus of Chapter Eight.)

Francisco also perceived attending community college as an outcome to which he was reduced by the circumstances of his legal status:

All through high school I had good grades, my ACT score was pretty good. And I wanted to go out of state to school. But since my status here isn't... what it should be, I can't get financial aid. I mean I did get a scholarship because of my academics, but it wouldn't pay my whole tuition. So I wouldn't say I got stuck coming here [to GCC], but in a sense I did. I mean I busted my butt all throughout high school to come here where, I mean, the level of class just isn't as high. [...] I felt that the classes were actually easier than high school.

In addition to the lack of rigor, or as a consequence of it, Francisco expressed the belief that attending community college can dull one's academic powers or will to pursue a degree. He felt fortunate that he had spent only a year at GCC before transferring to a four-year institution:

With just the one year that I slacked off here it was kind of like a wake up call. And when I went over it wasn't as bad, because it wasn't as long a period. I had a couple of friends who came here for a couple years and I mean they're barely applying to another university for transfer, or they just take one class a semester now. So I know that if I would have done that I would have maybe started working and not paid so much attention to staying in school and finishing.

Jose also found the community college to lack academic challenge, and though he enrolled, given his long-term objectives he was not motivated to obtain a degree:

I wasn't being challenged here. I don't think I was. Plus it's a community college.... My friends told me, "Why don't you get your associate's?" I'm like, "I don't want an associate's." It's not, it's never gonna do anything for me. I wanna get my bachelor's and then probably Ph.D. Associate's is not gonna do anything for me. I just wanna do my gen eds, get them out of the way.

Though he is somewhat dismissive of the value of the community college, Jose's remarks reveal that he recognized it at least as a resource for obtaining a set of transferable credits.

The dismissive attitude toward community colleges was in some cases reinforced by authority figures at the high school. Nadia described going to GCC as “my last option” due to the influence of a teacher: “He was my math teacher, and he was like, You’re going to [GCC]? Damn, you’re wasting your time, why not just get a job and don’t do anything if you’re going over there.”

Veronica had, together with a high school friend, decided to attend a university in a town some distance from home. Due to financial issues (related to her immigration status), these plans were abandoned at the eleventh hour. She only reluctantly accepted the idea of attending her local community college, GCC:

I was like, if I don’t go to [university X], I’m not going anywhere, I don’t wanna go anywhere, it’s gonna be into a university and not into a community college. Because you get into the buzz of what everybody is saying. [...] But once you come out of high school, realize what the real world is, it’s like, It doesn’t matter where I go, as long as I learn, and I put myself to learn, it should be fine. It doesn’t matter where you go, it matters what you try to do and what you learn from that.

Influenced by her peers (“the buzz”), Veronica had adopted a skeptical attitude toward the idea of the community college. However, in accordance with her general determination to see the good side of things, she attempts to put a positive spin on the situation which her circumstances had made necessary.

A similar story was related by Daniel, who had set his sights on another university in the area but, due to financial limitations similar to Xochitl’s, Veronica’s, and Francisco’s, ended up at the community college:

Last semester I wanted to go to [four-year university] but then I didn’t have the economic resources, so [...] And they offered me here a scholarship for three years, and I said “OK, I’m having the same education, so yeah, I’ll go.”

Like Veronica, Daniel was generally positive about the experience, having become heavily involved in various college activities, but still held the hope of transferring to the four-year school.

Other participants expressed warm appreciation for the opportunity to enroll in community college. Having rejected her math teacher's advice and enrolled at GCC, Nadia described the experience positively:

I decided to come here. And the difference, I'm more involved in school, and I have my goals. [...] Now I have more friends, because the college experience helped me to be more outgoing, not being afraid to talk to people. And be more willing to change. Because my life has changed a lot.

Overall, those who because of their family backgrounds or schooling saw higher education as less of a given in their lives – Roxana, Ofelia, Nadia – reported stronger feelings of satisfaction with being at the community college.

Financing College

The large majority of participants described family economic conditions typical of new immigrants living in gateway communities, in which household expenses are met by combining income streams from various family members employed in lower-wage fields. This means that in many cases even younger family members are expected to contribute. Low household socioeconomic status has been seen to significantly reduce the success rate of immigrant students (McKay & Wong, 2000), and participants seemed quite aware of the threat their financial circumstances presented to their academic aspirations.

All of the participants characterized their ability to finance college as a challenge, with the majority citing this as the most significant barrier to their success. Apart from limited family resources, however, the major contributing factor in many cases was

ineligibility for student financial aid such as Pell grants and guaranteed loans due to undocumented immigration status, a status which also greatly complicated those individuals' employment prospects.

For several participants, their presence at the community college despite strong academic aptitude and achievement was directly related to finances. Daniel stated this simply: "I wanted to go [to a four-year university]... but then I didn't have the economic resources." Veronica, Xochitl, Francisco, and others made similar points.

When asked to specify what the "biggest challenge" they faced in pursuing their academic goals, nearly all participants responded in words similar to Sara, who said without hesitation: "Money. Money, to pay college, to pay my books, and... [sigh] yeah." Ofelia, with similar alacrity and even more succinctness, said: "The economic thing." Nadia added a predicate – "What pushes me back is the money" – and Carmen an adverb: "My biggest challenge would probably be money."

Francisco extended his explanation somewhat more than others. To the question "What is your biggest challenge?" he replied:

I would say financial. Because my parents don't make enough money to even do anything. They barely make enough to put food on the table, pay rent, bills, whatever. So I pay my own tuition myself. And I can't really get a good job. So I have to budget, pay my tuition every month, at the beginning of the semester pay my books. I have to pay the cell phone bill, gas money... so just financial is the biggest struggle, and I think it will be until my status here, somehow....

Francisco described the effect that his immigration status and the consequences of this on his finances and college plans: "I wanted to go out of state to school. But... I can't get financial aid. I mean I did get a scholarship because of my academics, but it wouldn't pay my whole tuition."

Like Francisco, several participants made the point that their parents were unable to contribute substantially to their college expenses. Ofelia reported: “My mom told me, ‘OK, now you want to go to college, you want to go to university, now you have to pay for your education.’ [...] But it’s expensive to pay!”

Xochitl described how she meets her college expenses:

I have to pay out of my pocket. I mean, my parents help me whatever they can. I work part-time, enough for me to pay my school, or anything that I need. But it’s hard, because, you know, even if it’s just like a thousand dollars per semester it’s like [sucks in air through teeth] it hurts. [laughs] To pay it. And then books, you know, and then extra expenses. So it is hard, I’m paying out of my pocket right now. And my dad helps me whenever he can.

Xochitl went on to explain that due to the current business downturn, her parents’ ability to contribute to her education was minimal. The lack of family funding and access to financial aid presented ongoing challenges to Xochitl’s transfer plans as well:

I applied to [two universities], so, they both admitted me there, and they know about my situation. [...] They look at my grades, they look at my GPA, and they’re like, “Well, you know, we don’t have a problem admitting you.” It’s just, they even worry, “How you gonna pay your school?” And I’m like, “Exactly, I need options here, scholarships or any type of help.” So I’m working on them. With them, as scholarships, they’re offering me like internships, where they can pay me everything for me, the dorm there, or participate in research programs, like... just for me to be able to attend college. And I’m like, if they’re offering it to me, why not. I’m gonna take chances, I’m just gonna go for it.

Like several of the participants, Roxana was able to support her studies at GCC by enrolling in a “bridge” program (described in the following section) which provided tuition assistance which participants described as an essential financial lifeline. But many also expressed concern about what would happen when that lifeline was eventually cut. Regarding her plans to continue her studies in a four-year school, Roxana said:

I hope it happens, but there's always little things that can be in the way. I want to pay for my school, and right now I have the scholarship. [...] And I'm hoping for the next two years I would get support from my parents or I would get my own support, which, I'm gonna start working.

Even given the precariousness of her family's financial situation, Roxana's hopes seem to rest on her parents' ability to help with the "little things" like university tuition. Yet her determination, like Xochitl's, is evident, as was Sara's as she described how she was dealing with her financial challenges:

I started working more, to pay my books, and I was lucky to get a scholarship to pay my tuition. Well, for two years. But I don't know about university, how I'm gonna get the money for that. But I'm just gonna study, I'm not gonna stop.

College Bridge Programs

As described in the previous section, several interviewees cited their participation in a college bridge program with its associated scholarships as central to their ability to support their studies financially. The benefits of this program were by no means, however, limited to funding.

The GCC bridge program was created in close accordance with a model proposed by Tinto (1975, 1987), who saw a strong correlation between student engagement and academic persistence, and recommended institutional solutions which would combine learning communities (student cohorts in pedagogically linked courses) with activities designed to enhance students' connections to the college. (Tinto's widely influential work was so valued by college officials at GCC that a few years previously he had been invited to campus to make presentations and conduct workshops with staff.)

The GCC bridge program was offered to students from local high schools based on need and academic credentials. The program consisted of a combination of summer

pre-college preparation, learning communities, and participation in campus activities, and (as noted) the students who enrolled in the program received scholarships which covered most of the costs of tuition and books. A major component of the bridge program was to require participating students to engage in community service at the college, and those interested were also encouraged to take part in (and engage in fundraising to pay for) conferences on student issues.

Several of the participants in this study reported being enrolled in the GCC bridge program, while another had taken part in a bridge program in her high school. For all of these students, the programs seemed to play a vital role in their success. All offered strongly positive perspectives on the experience; their characterizations ranged from describing it as a source of essential practical information to a vehicle of personal change.

Sara described the value of the GCC program in helping her to make the leap from secondary to higher education:

The transition from high school to college was great because we came for summer school. And they gave us like introduction to what is college, and I think that really helped me, because I didn't know anything about college. I felt confident about coming to college after summer school.

Daniel agreed that the program “help[ed] the transition through high school going to college” and described it as significant to his success.

For some, the program was not merely helpful but transformative. Before finding out about the bridge program, Roxana was a part-time GCC student and was considering the option of returning to Mexico for university, a difficult choice since due to her immigration status she had no way of knowing when she would be able to see her family in the U.S. again if she left the country. Nonetheless, she was on the verge of leaving

when she happened to hear about the bridge program. She joined, and the experience changed her perspective:

I was really into it, I was into clubs, I was into the meetings, I was trying to find ways and stuff. That's when I said, "OK, I have to stay here." And I was gonna go back! I'm like, "If I don't get this scholarship, I'm leaving, there's no hope for me here." [...] It just pushed me to be here. I love coming to school now 'cause I'm so active. [...] I've found every time I come here I learn something from a different person that I see.

Roxana's path from "there's no hope" to "I love coming to school now" provides a good example to support the widely-held notion that students who engage in college beyond the classroom are more motivated to succeed (Garcia, 2001; Halpin, 1990; Tinto, 1975, 1987). Ofelia also spoke of how participation in the bridge program changed her:

The first year when I came here to [GCC] it was not good, just taking my classes, that's not good. To be involved in different things, everything that I've done right now.... I would have never thought, "Wow, I'm doing all this." For example, to volunteer, to do fundraising, to go to different conferences. I went to see Obama and McCain in San Diego, California.

Attending conferences on topics related to their academic lives, including those focused on Latino student issues, was a key component of the bridge program. Echoing Ofelia's "Wow, I'm doing all this," Roxana expressed surprise at the effects of her engaging in these activities:

I went to a conference and the conference would talk about everything was about Hispanics. "Well, I used to come from over there, and look who I am right now." And I was like, "Oh my god, if they did it, why can't I do it?" So that's what really got me into it. [...] And maybe I'm here because of some, because I belong here. I'm supposed to be here.

In this last line Roxana reveals – just as Ofelia reveals in her comment about Obama and McCain (and reminiscent of Xochitl's description of her high school club activities with senior citizens) – a sense of connectedness not only with the college but with the larger

community. They describe having come for the first time to a level of adult participation with the larger society of the U.S. And this is not a one-way street, but a dialogue: The students do not attend conferences but participate in them, as volunteers helping to organize, and often as presenters. Ofelia's story demonstrates just how deep the transformation can be:

I started to like the classes, to be involved in that, to go to retreats, to conferences. [...] I was a quiet person that didn't ask for help, I was just like in my living room, confused, I don't know about this, I don't know who can help me, I was just there watching *novelas*. I can see that girl, so confused, like when I was sixteen, I can see that girl confused, alone. And now it's like, I want to do this, I finished this, I achieved some goals that I have, now I want more. [...] And I know that I can achieve all these goals. [...] I'm still talking with some people that I met in different conferences, we plan to do a workshop.

The college bridge program in which Carmen participated was distinct from the GCC program in that it functioned in conjunction with her high school rather than college. This program focused on preparing secondary students to successfully transition to college by means of after-school tutoring, coaching, and seminars. Carmen gave the program a large share of the credit for her academic success at college:

I went to the college bridge program my junior and senior year, which helped me out immensely. It was like a stepping stone, that I really needed in order to get here. So now I feel like I know what it's all about, I know the ins and outs.

Extracurricular Involvement at College

In the previous chapter, participants' involvement in sports and other extracurricular activities during high school, and the adaptive function of these, were described (under the heading "Extracurricular Engagement and Acculturation"). The present section can be viewed as a logical extension of that material. In addition, this section involves some overlap with discussion in the immediately preceding section

focused the GCC bridge program, since a key feature of that program was to foster students' engagement in certain extracurricular endeavors.

Roughly half of the participants reported engaging in significant extracurricular activities while in college, activities including sports, clubs, volunteering, performance arts, and student governance. In many cases these activities were tied to financial incentives, such as scholarships for sports, the college bridge program, and student governance.

Those who did not cite such activities as important in their college experience included Marta and the brothers, Andres and Gerardo. In these three cases at least, any detrimental effect of a lack of engagement may be compensated by other circumstances. Andres and Gerardo each made the point that throughout their experience of coming and adapting to a new environment, being a pair allowed them to avoid feeling truly disconnected. As Andres said: "We were never alone, there was always him. Most of the things that we did we did it together."

Marta's connection with the college community took a different form. Having described the strong, positive influence of her involvement in clubs in high school, she admitted that she had not joined any similar groups in college and expressed regret at this: "I would know a little bit more about the college, the other students, meeting the teachers, the staff." However, she immediately followed this with another statement: "I worked here spring and summer semester, at the adult education program, where you sign up new students. It was interesting because I spoke to a lot of teachers and I learned a lot about the school."

Like Marta, several participants spoke of working in different areas of the college, some as volunteers, activities which supported their association with staff and other students. Others became involved in student leadership at the college, a form of engagement which like joining a sports team requires students to move from being spectators to players. Nadia described how in the time after she first moved to the GCC district, she spent a lot of time with friends in the Latino enclave neighborhood in a nearby city, where she had grown up. After enrolling at GCC, her habits changed:

I came here and it was better, I joined some other school activities. And now I know more friends, and now I barely go over there. Now I have more friends, because the college experience helped me to be more outgoing, not being afraid to talk to people. And be more willing to change. Because my life has changed a lot. So whatever change that comes in the way, I'm ready, I guess. [...]

Asked why she chose to invest her scarce free time in student leadership, Nadia explained that she “wanted to do something, to give something back.”

Certain of the extracurricular activities mentioned by participants seemed especially effective in (and perhaps specifically designed for the purpose of) addressing the ongoing challenge of integrating students of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds into the life of the college. In addition to the Latino education conferences and related activities described in the preceding section, some participants spoke of their involvement with a Hispanic leadership club on campus. Such activities comprise useful models of what Laden (1999) termed “culturally-sensitive and culturally-specific programs in academic and student services to increase ethnic student motivation and commitment to college” (p. 176).

Several participants reported involvement in sports ranging from soccer to track

and field, which typically implied scholarships for both GCC and transfer institutions. In at least one case, sports involvement also led to part-time employment as a referee. Other participants were involved in artistic productions at the college.

Much as extracurricular involvement had served to help make participants feel more grounded in high school and thereby to adapt successfully enough to the new setting to accomplish their goals there, such involvement seems to play a similar role at college. And as in high school, extracurricular activities serve not only to help students better understand the general culture but that culture specific to the educational setting; engagement in college helps students understand how to navigate the culture of American higher education.

Hit-or-Miss: Advising and Mentoring at College

One implication of the lack of experience in higher education among immigrant students and their families (as discussed under “Scarcity of Information and Expertise for College Planning” above) is that the importance of effective advising and mentoring at the college level becomes is heightened. This is true both for potential and incoming students as well as those well along their path through college.

Similar to how they characterized their high school advising, participants’ descriptions of how and from whom they received information about making choices at the college revealed a decidedly mixed bag of experiences. Several spoke warmly of being inspired and encouraged by an adviser, while others told of getting incorrect information and thereby being set back academically, in some cases substantially. In the cases where experiences were positive, the contact with the key informant was often

accidental rather than by institutional design.

Asked to offer an example of a person who they felt was especially helpful to them at college, several participants mentioned the same adviser – an individual who had been connected with the college bridge program. Roxana described this adviser as an influential mentor:

He actually pushed me to stay here, and he said, “Look, there’s a lot of things that you could do. [...] Not a lot of people like you are here in college, and you have to take advantage that your parents are supporting you and giving you the opportunity to continue your education here.”

As seen here, a clear lesson to be gleaned from the narrative data is that one person can make a significant difference in many lives.

In a few cases, the connection between college recruiting and advising was seen to work effectively. Veronica described having spoken with a college staff member at her high school, and then encountering him when she went to register:

Once I saw him over here, I was like, “Oh my god, you’re gonna help me, right?” He’s like, “Come here, we’ll talk about it, what things that you’re taking, what is better for you....” The help from him made me feel way more comfortable. [...] Seeing a couple of people that I knew, made me feel like less of an outsider. The fact that he was there was a lot of help.

On the other extreme, Andres described how he and his brother had transferred to another community college because of their interest in a particular program offered there, but then had gotten incorrect information from an adviser:

At the beginning they told us that, they gave us a list of classes that we needed to take to transfer, but then it happened that that wasn’t the right list, and we took some classes that we didn’t really have to take [...] and it was a lot of classes. And then they actually pointed us to the right person, and then we started taking the classes that we had to take. And we wasted over a year doing that.

Lidia narrowly avoided a fate similar to Andres and Gerardo’s:

I had a little confusion with other counselors, though. ‘Cause one told me one thing, and I went crazy, I was like “Oh my god, how could this be?” and then I went to talk to that counselor for [program X] and she told me “Look, things are done like this and like this and like this, that counselor got confused, and I understand how,” and so she explained it to me. I think because of her, I am where I am now, where I know next semester I can take this and be fine, and the following I can take this and be fine.

In Lidia’s case, she was set on the path to the correct adviser by the lucky intervention of a relative who worked at the college. Asked what would have happened if she hadn’t found the second adviser, she replied: “Honestly? I don’t know where I would be at right now.”

Other participants spoke, like Lidia, of rather uneven successes wherein family and peers attempted to help them connect with useful college advisers and mentors. The most common way that participants learned about the college bridge program seemed to be word of mouth or the example of a classmate. Ofelia’s path to involvement in extracurricular activities began, for instance, at a friend’s urging:

She told me, “Why you aren’t doing this, why you aren’t doing that? You don’t know about the volunteering?” I was like, “No.” Then she started to tell me, “Oh, stay with me just one hour. Stay with me just one hour.” I was like, “OK, I don’t watch my *novela* today. That’s fine.” And then, I started to be involved in all those things.

Teaching and Tutoring in College

As discussed under the heading “Confidence in Academic Abilities” above, most of the participants demonstrated marked self-assurance in regard to their intellectual skills. It is not surprising, therefore, that few described themselves as regular users of college tutoring or other academic support services, nor that when particular teachers were singled out for commendation this was often due to their insistence on high

standards.

To illustrate her view of what constituted effective teaching, Carmen offered contrasting descriptions of two instructors:

For example, in my English 101 class, I turn in the assignments and I would get a high grade, a passing grade, and that would be the end of it. But this one particular professor, if I got a high grade, he would push it further. He would go, “OK now, continue with this, or explore this more, and let me know what you come up with.” He kind of gave me the opportunity to continue, and not just stay at a, you know a 90 or a 95 or whatever the case may be. Like before they were satisfied with whatever I came up with, but he kind of pushed it and said, “You can do better than that. Let’s see what you have.”

In the context of the earlier discussion of academic confidence and capacity, Carmen’s description includes the very revealing suggestion that she is grateful for the opportunity to raise her grade above a mere “90 or a 95.”

Several participants cited the importance of communication with teachers. Xochitl described an important element of her academic success as “just talking to the instructors, keeping a good communication with them.” Lidia used one of her professors to illustrate her notion of an effective teacher as one with open communication and a caring temperament, but like Carmen, she made clear that high expectations were also key:

I could really feel like I could go and talk to him and tell him like maybe I don’t have my homework and I could be honest with him. [...] He actually stops and tries to hear us. [...] You could really see when a professor is trying to be very strict to try to get on your nerves or something, and then there’s those teachers that you can know right away that they care. But you can know that you cannot mess with them, you know. They’re nice up to a point.

Participants’ views on the value of tutoring were somewhat more mixed. On the more positive side was Ofelia, who described tutoring as a useful supplement to her instructors: “They help me understand some things that maybe the teacher doesn’t have

time for.” Marta also reported regularly using tutoring services, but only for one subject:

I find myself getting more stuck with math. And I try to go [to the tutoring center] as much as I can, to talk to tutors and try to understand. Because I sometimes see the person sitting next to me finishing the problem, like nothing, and then I’m still stuck.

Guillermo described taking advantage of tutoring for math as well, and also mentioned his use of a service which he found very helpful for overcoming his discomfort with public speaking in English: “We have like a speech lab, where you can practice your speeches.” However, he made clear that he did not feel his use of these services was in any way unique to him as an immigrant: “I’ve used those kinds of resources, but not any different from other people.”

Like Marta, Jose seemed to view his difficulties with math as unsettling. Although he confessed that he did not use tutoring, he self-deprecatingly expressed some regret at this, revealing his belief that tutoring could have helped:

At times I know I should have, but I ... I was too arrogant. I was like, “I don’t need that shit.” And for math, I should’ve taken it, I really should, but I really never did. Because in any other class which required uh, either history or reading or even science, I would perform relatively well. It was just math that I was a complete idiot.

Other participants reported having little use for tutoring services. Asked if she had ever availed herself of such assistance in support of her class work, Carmen replied with some finality: “No, none of it. Nothing, just class, that’s it.” Lidia’s position was similar, though perhaps less adamant: “No, I haven’t. I’m not saying I never will, because sometimes you need the help, but so far no. I haven’t done that.”

Some participants expressed dissatisfaction with tutoring services based on their

experiences with them. Sara's story illustrates this position aptly:

Oh, I used it one time [...] I never went back. They helped me do an essay and ... I failed. I failed my essay! And I was really mad, cause I was expecting a better grade. And that was the first time that I failed an essay.

The note of chagrin in "I failed my essay!" provides a glimpse of the high academic expectations Sara has for herself, together with her claim that this was the first time she had gotten less than a passing grade on her writing. Like many students, even without the tutoring center she found ways to get assistance and feedback on her work from other sources: "I just, I ask for help to my friends, or to other people, to my boyfriend, basically."

Discussion: College as Consolidation

As the first significant life choice most students have made for themselves, college signifies far more than just an extension of high school, and their success or failure there becomes a kind of personal quest. For mid-childhood immigrants, going to college represents not only a move toward autonomy but the next stage in a process which began with their migration – a stage of consolidating their knowledge about the host culture, of dealing with the conflicts or dissonances which arise (commonly related to concerns of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identity), and of making choices about how they will proceed. Rather than the more passive role of childhood, when information is mostly being received, college represents a time when the immigrants and their not-so-new-anymore environment engage bidirectionally. As Bean and Stevens (2003) define it, "assimilation means the convergence of newcomer and host groups, with each affecting the other, not unidirectional movement of newcomers toward native groups" (p. 94).

Taken as a whole, Bean and Stevens (2003) situate these processes – initiation, acculturation, adaptation, accommodation, assimilation – under the omnibus term incorporation.

Mid-childhood immigrants reach college with the complex and often-jarring processes of initial adaptation behind them, and in most cases they are well along the path of acculturation and some degree of assimilation. These ongoing, dynamic, and often challenging processes are examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND MID-CHILDHOOD IMMIGRANT IDENTITY

Although few students would describe their goals in pursuing an education as including assimilation into the larger society, this is an unavoidable dynamic of the project. If K-12 education is the primary vehicle by which a society ensures that children learn about and “buy in” to its fundamental norms and values – essentially bringing the society to them – then higher education is the vehicle by which emerging adults move toward participation in the larger social and economic spheres (in Bronfenbrenner terms, the macrosystem). In other words, college brings them to the society. For all students, native or newcomer, success depends to a great degree upon a process of cultural learning and adaptation; those who refuse to “fit in” to the academic (and later, professional) cultures in which they perform do not usually go far. For immigrants, this cultural learning can be significantly more complicated than for natives, though on the other hand they may have more practice at adaptation.

By the time they arrive at college, mid-childhood immigrants have typically already undergone – in addition to the usual metamorphoses of late childhood and adolescence – a transformation that is among the most extreme imaginable within the boundaries of normal human experience: They have taken on (or are in the process of taking on) a new cultural and linguistic identity. Unlike their younger siblings, who arrived as relatively fresh clay and are for the most part fully molded by the new

environment, and unlike their parents and older siblings, who arrive for the most part fully formed by the old environment, those who arrive in the midst of their emerging personhood have been molded by something closer to equal parts old and new.

Sometimes these parts coexist peaceably, sometimes they jostle discordantly, and sometimes they complement and enhance each other. In any event, mid-childhood immigrants have made a crossing from one kind of being to another in a way that few people ever know.

This chapter covers an array of processes which began with the participants' arrival during late childhood or adolescence and which in many ways were ongoing through the point of data collection in early adulthood. The chapter begins with an exploration of how participants described their language learning and how becoming bilingual influenced their worldviews and identities. Next, the focus turns to participants' perspectives on the immigration experience itself and their processes of negotiation, adaptation, and acculturation in the new setting, including not only how they perceived themselves as newcomers but how they saw others as perceiving them. The third major subsection presents what the data reveal about participants' current sense of identity, the conditions and events which have contributed to forming that sense, and how they as young adults have begun to settle into somewhat established immigrant identities based in most instances on an integrative model. To varying degrees, these are all dynamic and bidirectional processes, often developing unevenly within each individual's experiences and with considerable variation across the group; nonetheless, some clear patterns emerge from the data.

New Language, New Culture, New Identity?

The relationship between language, culture, and identity is as undeniable as it is difficult to precisely define. Whether they accept the extreme rhetorical position staked out by Chicana commentator Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) when she asserts, “I am my language” (p. 81), individuals with life experience in more than one language understand that speaking one or another almost always involves far more than a linguistic shift. This understanding is well represented in the narrative data in this study, in which participants expressed views consistent with other research indicating that bilingual students tend to view language “as a synonym for culture” (Chiang & Sumida, 1999, p. 85).

This is not to say that the participants conflated language and culture, but that for the sake of convenience they often use the one, language, as a kind of proxy for the other, culture. Which, if one does the math, adds up to two languages plus two cultures for mid-childhood immigrants – all of which compete and entwine in the construction of such an individual’s identity.

Those who speak more than one language proficiently know that being able to do so affords them a degree of access into the confidence of other speakers that is simply unavailable to non-speakers, like a secret handshake allows entry into a private club. This entry is conditional and subject to revision, but it is real nonetheless, and granted based on the supposition that one who has undertaken the very considerable task of learning a language fully is thereby heavily invested in the cultural group which speaks that language. And this is in fact often the case, as even those who start out with no particular desire to acculturate to a new setting – who purport to learn a language for purely

practical purposes – can find themselves in the end having internalized much more than just a means of communication. At the beginning, learning a language can be a purely academic exercise, but at some point the process becomes not so much one of learning a language as one of becoming a speaker of another language, that is to say, of becoming a different kind of person.¹⁴

When the language learning occurs within a native-speaker setting, the natural tendency to internalize cultural content together with the new language (and vice versa) is greatly enhanced. This developmental dynamic could be discerned in the participants of this study, whose narratives afford valuable insights into the evolving relationship and interactivity between the new and old languages and cultures, into their perspectives on this process and on the immigration experience in general, and finally into their notions of identity.

ESL and Bilingual Education

As evidenced in the interviews, variation in language skills among the participants¹⁵ was for the most part exactly what language acquisition research would lead one to expect, with those arriving at a younger age demonstrating greater proficiency (Krashen, 1979; Krashen, Scarcella & Long, 1982; Long, 1990; Singleton & Langyel, 1996). In some cases, participants used English with minimal discernable nonnative features (or “accent”), and at a proficiency level equal to that of articulate and educated

¹⁴ This may be less true in the case of multilingual individuals adding new languages, but certainly going from monolingual to bilingual is a significant transformation.

¹⁵ Although language testing was not a part of the study, my training and long experience in second language assessment, combined with lengthy interviews, informed my judgments on this question.

native speakers. For those at the other extreme, language use was marked with non-native pronunciation, patterned syntax errors, vocabulary limitations, and “work-around” strategies. In one case, despite early arrival, the participant had resisted learning English for several years (a choice enabled by a schooling environment in which the language was not necessary), and as such demonstrated a language profile more akin to a much later arriver.

All interviewees reported placement in ESL or bilingual classes on arrival, the length of participation in which ranged from one to four years. Participants reported experiencing a variety of classroom approaches, from full-time ESL classes to part-time “pull-out” programs (wherein English-learning students are given separate instruction for given periods), to programs employing bilingual methods throughout the school day. Only a few participants volunteered specifically positive commentary regarding their experiences in ESL and bilingual education, and those who offered the most extensive observations about it offered critical views.

One participant who reported a positive experience was Francisco:

I think the bilingual classes really helped out. A couple years later my sister was put in all English classes and she had a hard time. But I think the bilingual classes helped. Because you are learning a new language, but at the same time you’re getting feedback in the language you know. So it does help a lot. Instead of just getting put into an English class where you wouldn’t understand a single word.

In general, however, the participants were less affirmative. Their perspectives, which characterize the ESL and bilingual experiences as lacking rigor, being counterproductive, or having a segregative effect, are presented in ensuing subsections.

Variation in Reported Time to English Proficiency

Participants were asked to talk about their experiences learning English, and were specifically requested to estimate the length of time they felt had passed from the time of their arrival until they felt that English was no longer a significant barrier to them at school. Their responses were, of course, purely subjective in addition to being unverifiable within the scope of this study; however, these responses are interesting as an indicator of how difficult learning English seemed to them. The shortest time reported before participants felt that English was no longer a major issue was between a year and eighteen months, with four participants reporting this span. Most participants, however, reported needing between two and four years, with roughly half in this group. Others reported needing more than four years, with the maximum at seven.

What is clear is that different individuals, all of demonstrably normal to high intellectual capacity, learned the new language at significantly different rates and with diverging degrees of success. For the most part, those who arrived earlier showed more native-like proficiency, while those who arrived later had the most obviously nonnative English. Among the earliest arrivers, Xochitl and Marta used English which a non-specialist would be hard pressed to identify as nonnative even after listening to extended recordings. Conversely, the latest arrivers, Nadia and Ofelia, showed the kind of language markers common to adult learners. Outcomes were less predictable in other cases, however: Jose and Sara, arriving at 11 and 10 respectively, exhibited high-level speaking proficiency, whereas Carmen, Veronica, and Roxana, who arrived at 8, 9 and 10, respectively, produced more clearly nonnative English. (Participants also reported a wide

range of skill and confidence in Spanish.)

In addition to differences in individuals' proclivity and aptitude for language acquisition, this wide discrepancy in English learning experience and outcomes – even among a group with strong similarities in background, country of origin, schooling, and place of residence in the U.S. – may have various contributing causes: the kinds of programs and teachers they encountered in school; the kinds of modeling, guidance, or advocacy their parents provided; the effects of the social group and community. How these ecosystems interact in the lives of mid-childhood immigrants and how they influence language acquisition are apt subjects for further research.

“In the Corner”: ESL/Bilingual Education as Segregation

In Chapter Five (“Changes in Behavior and Personality”), participants described becoming emotionally withdrawn and fearful upon arriving in the new cultural and linguistic setting of U.S. schools. Such internal feelings were mirrored by the external conditions of their experiences in ESL and bilingual education, which they described in terms of being isolated and segregated from “normal” school life. In most cases, they were placed into classes which emphasized English learning (i.e., ESL) and/or classes in which both English and Spanish were used (i.e., bilingual), joining the general school population for limited periods each day, usually in classes in which the language burden was seen as lower such as math and science.

Andres described the situation he and his brother faced:

We only mixed with other students in math and PE. All the other classes like English, history, science, were all with the same [ESL] group. [...] We were in a segregated group from the school. We felt like that, we didn't interact with pretty

much all the other students. [...] We felt like “OK, I’m the new guy so I should be in this corner with the ESL people.” Cause I’m pretty sure that’s how most of the ESL students felt.

Echoing Andres’s description of feeling set apart, Nadia even used the same wording when she described herself as, “The new girl, just in the corner.” She elaborated, adding the suggestion that ESL students were provided less assistance than others:

In ESL, regular students look at you like the weirdos over there. Like don’t talk to them because they don’t speak English. The regular students, they’d get more information than we did.

Given these negative perceptions, it is not surprising that participants viewed getting out of ESL and bilingual classes as highly desirable. Xochitl described how after three years in ESL, a teacher encouraged her to move into “regular” classes:

They moved me to completely English education, they got me out of ESL. Cause my teacher talked to me, she’s like, “You know, you have the potential to get out of here, you know? So if you really try hard we can move you to, just, be like everyone else, you know, in completely all English program.”

In this instance, Xochitl describes her teacher as underlining the sense that being in ESL equates with separation and difference, not being “like everyone else.” She speaks of ESL almost as a prison, with the goal being “to get out of there.” Andres described a similar desire: “I wanted to be like anyone else, like be able to have other classes. I would’ve loved to have the chance to take those classes.”

The effects of these feelings of separation during the school years can be persistent. Most participants mentioned how even at college they had few friends who were not ethnically and linguistically similar to them. An exception was Xochitl, who described feeling very different from her peers in this regard – and being perceived differently by those peers as well.

Ellen explained how in college she and her Spanish-speaking friends had to make a special effort to practice English periodically. Asked if she had friends who spoke only English, Ellen responded:

Close friends? No. But sometimes in our group we try to speak English to each other. Because we're afraid that later on, we're gonna interact with some other students who speak English and we don't want English to be a problem for us.

Even after living more than half her life in the U.S., Ellen reported having no close friends who did not speak Spanish. This is certainly a phenomenon in which residence in the enclave community is strongly implicated; of the two individuals who claimed to have mostly non-Spanish-speaking social circles, one went to high school outside the community and the other moved out of the Spanish-speaking enclave at the end of elementary school. (Further discussion of the enclave effect is presented below.)

Perception of ESL/BE Programs as Lacking Rigor

Although most agreed that they had ultimately managed to achieve an acceptable proficiency level in English, nearly all participants described the ESL and bilingual programs they attended in distinctly unfavorable terms. Several reported feeling that these classes failed to offer an academically challenging environment. Gerardo described his first years of schooling in the U.S.: “It was very funny. I was studying the same subjects that I had in Mexico, but at lower level, with half Spanish, half English. So I wasn't really being pushed into learning the language.” He reiterated this sense of not being “pushed” several times:

I was never really pushed into learning the language [...]. I was never really challenged. Even though some stuff was new, the ESL program the way it's structured, I guess they don't push students into really learning, into having like more academic challenges. I guess they just wanna have them start to adjust,

incorporate a new language into their lives, so they never really pushed us into really having academic, like, success.

Andres described the experience in very similar terms:

I think it would have been a little better if the teachers or even the same group of ESL would have pushed us to learn language faster. Cause I guess they were really very lenient with us. [...] I wish I had been pushed more to learn the language.

Those who did manage to achieve an appropriate level of proficiency in English tended to attribute this not to their schools' curricular offerings, but rather to individual mentors or to their own efforts. Like any truly successful language learner, Roxana came to understand that her progress would ultimately depend on one person: "I had to push myself if I wanted to have a good English. I had to push myself."

In some cases, the need for specialized ESL or bilingual classes meant that students had to attend schools outside their neighborhoods and to switch schools periodically. Roxana was at first not permitted to attend a school directly across the street from her house because there was no space in that school's ESL classes. Ellen described being sent to three different schools between third and seventh grade for similar reasons. Francisco reported:

I've actually gone to a lot of schools since I came here. I went to one school for third grade, but then I had to go to another school because the bilingual program only went up to third grade. So I was sent out to another school. And after that I went to another school. So I've gone to many, many different schools.

In other cases, students reported being either kept in ESL classes or denied them based not on their needs or skills but on the availability of space. Daniel reported:

I was thinking of taking ESL advanced, but that class was full already, so I went to the regular class. And I got an A in that class, and I was still an ESL student, so it was kind of, hmmm...

In this case, Daniel came to question the rigor of the non-ESL classes considering that he, recently arrived and struggling with English, got the highest possible grade. In several instances, participants expressed the suspicion that decisions to place them into ESL or allow them to leave was based not on a genuine assessment of skills but other, less transparent reasons. Jose reported that his ninth-grade ESL teacher refused to let him transfer out of the program simply because it was late in the semester:

I told the teacher, “You know, I really shouldn’t be here.” And she’s like, “Oh no, you’re gonna have to stay here.” “But why, if I know all this stuff?” She’s like, “Well, it’s late in the semester, you’re gonna have to stay here.”

Jose related a story to illustrate that his ESL teacher acted as if their limited English skills were evidence of low intelligence, concluding:

The fact that she treated, not so much me but us, as mentally retarded, really pissed me off. And I think that’s how I declared war on her. And I gave her war, lots of it. So that, just the fact that she diminished our potential, my potential, that really really fired me up.

As a result of this “war,” Jose was removed from the ESL class and placed in study hall for the remainder of the semester. His claim of not needing further ESL was soon validated: “The next year I was in regular English class, and I had a really good score, and that teacher recommended me to take an AP class the next year. So I took an AP class and I aced it.”

Daniel reported a similar reaction in the face of doubting teachers, differentiating himself from peers who he perceived to be more complacent:

I’m a combative student. And I like to show people I can do stuff. But some of the people don’t have that kind of character, so when they say, “You’re not capable of doing anything, you’re not capable of having this class,” they’re like “Oh, OK.” And they go back.

In other instances, participants expressed strong dissatisfaction with “bilingual” programs in which the teachers spoke little English. (This can occur when schools recruit teachers from abroad to counter a scarcity of local bilingual applicants.) Ellen described being placed into “bilingual” classes for several years after her arrival in which the teachers were not strong English speakers:

In fifth grade, my teacher was from Mexico, and she talked to us in Spanish, Spanish, Spanish, all the time. Then when I was in sixth grade, my teacher was from Spain, and she talks in Spanish all the time, all the classes were in Spanish. No classes in English. I think I was really behind in English, because the teachers didn’t speak to me in English. It was everything Spanish, all the books were in Spanish. That’s what I don’t like about bilingual classes.

Though she uses the nomenclature her school apparently employed – “bilingual classes” – what Ellen describes is of course nothing of the kind. It was not until she reached eighth grade that she began spending a significant amount of time with a “White teacher” who didn’t speak Spanish. Her reaction to this was predictable: “I tried to avoid the teacher, because I didn’t know English.” The lesson Ellen has taken from her experience is one that would please those who favor greatly limiting ESL education: “I think those children who come from Latin America should go straight to English classes. Because they’re small and they could pick it up fast, and it would not be hard for them later on.”

Ofelia told a similar story. Arriving as a high school freshman, she was placed into and remained there for all four years. Her views closely echoed Ellen’s:

I think the bilingual classes, doesn’t help anything. They don’t help. [...] Because the teachers, they speak Spanish. They give to me the papers, like, “Write the definition in English, translate the word, plus the definition in Spanish.” So I have to do double work. Everything double. Definition in English, definition in Spanish. I can’t say it didn’t help me, but I’m pretty sure that there’s something that would help me more, if I would be with more American people. Or more, not

like American people, more like people who speak English and don't speak Spanish.

Ofelia allowed that students' avoidance of English was to a great extent enabled by the large Spanish-speaking population at her school. She described in contrast how one Polish immigrant boy who started with her in ESL as a freshman spent only one semester there, moving then into regular classes.

The Ongoing Role of Language

Despite having attained a level of English proficiency which enables them to succeed in college classes, nearly all of the participants expressed serious ongoing reservations about their language skills. Among the most articulate English speakers of the group, Jose described the biggest challenge he faced in his immigration experience: "The language acquisition, which I found to be hard, and frustrating. Especially for a kid that just wants to run and have friends." Even today, Jose confessed, he felt that his English was somewhat lacking: "I still have an accent right now." (This researcher can attest that this claim was only nominally valid.) Gerardo, who stated "I still don't think I'm very fluent," has a similar proficiency level. What these comments show is not so much an inaccurate view of proficiency, but a high sensitivity to the differences between their English and that of native speakers, which is in itself revealing, and suggestive of positive outcomes: Learners' overt awareness of their linguistic skills has been found to strongly correlate with language development (Golonka, 2006; Schmidt, 1990).

A common and lingering issue for language learners is that of the sense of social exclusion due to their linguistic skills. As discussed in the section titled "Attitudes toward First and Second Languages" in Chapter Two, language plays an essential social role of

establishing group membership and identifying and excluding cultural outsiders.

Participants in this study related incidents which showed this dynamic at work. Daniel described his early days in U.S. school in unequivocal terms: “[It] was hell for me, it’s just like the kids used to make fun of me. They’d say like ‘Are you a girl?’ and I didn’t know, I was like, ‘OK, yes.’”

Veronica described her initial experiences in the new linguistic environment in similarly disagreeable terms. In particular, she expressed her surprise at discovering that among the children in her school, linguistic difference trumped their shared ethnicity:

You see other people that are the same race as you, that they’re the same kind of way except for they were born here and they know English, and they picked on me and I was like, “OK, what’s going on?”

Even when others do not disparage their language skills overtly, language learners can censure themselves, internalizing the notion that the inability to speak well equates with defective intellect or character (which, as seen in Jose’s story of his teacher viewing ESL students as “mentally retarded,” can be reinforced by authority figures). Gerardo offered an example of this internalized perspective:

I felt that I could write, read, and probably speak the language to, probably to some degree fluently, but I didn’t want to do it. I felt that I, uh, I guess I didn’t want to make a fool of myself in front of my friends, people that I knew.

When asked if he could recall an incident in which others in his new school had criticized or made fun of him for his language skills, Gerardo responded: “No, never, no. I guess that was just my own idea. But no, I never experienced anything of anyone making fun of me.” Despite having no vivid recollection of being ostracized, Gerardo was clearly aware of the universal role of language as an arbiter of worthiness and belonging in social

groups.

Family Language Use

The language of the home and family among the participants in this study was Spanish. None reported using English regularly in the home except those with younger siblings who were English-dominant. One participant reported occasionally speaking English with a parent.

Nonetheless, in many cases, parents were active promoters of their children's language learning. Some participants reported that their parents bought English learning videos for them to practice with. Daniel's father was among the most proactive: Since the family had arrived in June, he enrolled his son in summer school to study English. In addition he bought English-language movies and encouraged Daniel to watch them without the subtitles. Similarly, Xochitl described her father's early efforts to push his children to learn English:

My dad actually bought us these books, and he would literally just make us read them. After school, like sit us at the table and, you know, "You guys are gonna read them." It's like, "Why?" He's like, "I don't care, you guys have to learn," and, I mean, that's when I felt like I was really picking up English.

In a perhaps misguided effort to ensure their daughter would learn English as quickly as possible, Nadia's parents insisted that she be placed into non-ESL classes from her first day, a placement which school officials made reluctantly and which Nadia tearfully convinced her parents to rescind within days.

Carmen was unique in describing a parent who became fluent in English, and she reported how having the shared experience of learning English brought her and her mother closer: "The more English I spoke, the more my mom learned to speak, and now

she speaks it fluently, just like I do.” Seen from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner’s framework, this demonstrates how one ecosystem can influence another: Carmen’s language learning at school affected the development of her mother at home.

On the other hand, Carmen’s story also illustrates the potential downside of language shift, as the closeness she felt with her mother was reversed in the case of her father:

My dad went back to Mexico, so now I feel like I’m losing out on that experience because even when I talk to him on the phone or when I go visit, I can’t express myself the way I do in English, in Spanish. So like if I want to say something, not deep and emotional, just something that has more meaning than a normal everyday conversation, I struggle with that.

Shifting Perspectives: Language and Cultural Identity

Carmen’s experience as recounted in the previous section shows how interconnected are language and culture; surely there was more than just language creating a distance between her and her father, who had found it impossible to adapt to life in the U.S. and returned to Mexico. If there is some truth in Anzaldúa’s (1987) assertion, “I am my language” (p. 81), then the identity of the mid-childhood immigrant is a moving target. Surely few life experiences are as unsettling as facing the prospect of internalizing a new language and culture in the midst of what is already the identity-transforming process of adolescence.

One unmistakable outcome among the students interviewed in this study is that they ultimately came to a marked affirmation of English, expressing universally favorable views about the language. Andres spoke for the least enthusiastic, saying of English, simply, “I enjoy the language.” Given his description of resisting learning it during most

of his school years and only really embracing it after spending a year in Mexico after high school, this is nonetheless a significant concession. At the other extreme of the continuum, Marta described a warmer relationship: “I love English. I love reading. I love writing papers. A lot of my friends think that it’s weird.”

Those with cooler views toward English typically characterize their accommodation with it in utilitarian terms. “This is a country where you need to know English,” Andres said. “So I feel like it’s a tool now, like you need to be well educated at it in order to do something, in order to be successful.” Lidia offered a similarly practical perspective about knowing two languages: “Being bilingual, that’s something that nowadays everyone wants, and everybody should be bilingual, it’s like needed. [...] I like being bilingual. I like speaking English, cause it opens up doors, you know.”

Gerardo described how after having spent a year using Spanish, his view toward English became less connected with feelings of fitting in socially, and he came to perceive it less as an imperative and more as a practical choice:

I started seeing it as just another language, another way to communicate. I didn’t feel that I had to know the language, so I started being less concerned with not speaking it properly or fluently, because I started seeing it as just another language, a way to communicate, and that I spoke my native language fluently and properly, so that helped me start being more comfortable with speaking it or using words that I was not maybe, maybe that before I felt that I could use. From that point I started to get out of that life where you say “I’m not gonna speak the language.” And when I was in high school, I would do that. I would just say, I’m not gonna speak it, if I have to I’ll do it, but I don’t have to.

Feeling confident in his first language and culture, and having that confidence reinforced by spending an extended period in Mexico as a young adult, seems to have given Gerardo a kind of freedom to accept English. The experience had the effect of de-mystifying the

language, making him finally able to see it as “just another language, a way to communicate.” Ironically, it was not until he realized he didn’t *have* to learn the language that he felt himself able to dismantle his self-created barriers to doing so.

Marta also revealed her strong feelings toward her first language even as she saw herself moving toward the second:

I speak Spanish most of the time with my parents, but sometimes it’s easier for me to express what I feel and what I have to say in English than in Spanish. I’ve noticed that I have gotten to a point where I’m getting more used to the English language than the Spanish, which I don’t want to forget, and I don’t want to push aside, you know... but I have a bigger relationship with English.

As a college-educated adult coming to occupy a place in the larger, mostly English-speaking society of the U.S. – a process which draws her toward increasing identification with the majority language – Marta cannot help but express her sense of loss for her Spanish, “which I don’t want to forget, and I don’t want to push aside.”

Echoing and extending upon Lidia’s “I like being bilingual,” Carmen asserted, “I’ve never heard anyone complain about being bilingual. I’m able to communicate in two cultures, I’m able to assimilate in two different cultures.” Here Carmen makes clear her perception of language as inseparable from culture; she equates being bilingual with being bicultural. To the follow-up question, “Are you assimilated?” she replied:

Yes. I listen to the music, I read English books more than Spanish, all my friends are pretty Americanized, even my Hispanic friends. Few of them speak Spanish at all. I have maybe two friends that speak Spanish. Nobody really bothered, you know, instilling that in them, so they never bothered themselves.

When Veronica’s Mexican classmates made fun of her for not speaking English, she discovered that language outweighed ethnicity for group membership. Carmen here makes a similar observation: Language and ethnicity are separate, or at least separable,

issues. It is not ethnicity but language which more strongly marks those in her social group. At the same time, her ending comment about her peers' lack of Spanish is reminiscent of Marta's misgivings about the decline of her native language. Carmen clarified her view of English further:

I would say even though it's not my primary language, I feel like it's my primary language. I have more trouble with Spanish now than I do with English. I think in English, you know, my life is pretty much English.

Although Ellen, having not begun to learn English until eighth grade, was not as clearly dominant in this language as others, she too expressed a feeling that her native language was losing ground:

I know how to speak in Spanish, but I have problems with my grammar in Spanish. And for English, I think I understand English very well now, but I don't know how to speak it very well. So I'm like on both sides, I know how to write in English but I'm having problems with the speaking, and for Spanish I know how to speak, but I have some problems in the writing. So I just don't know. I'm afraid of that, because if I move to Mexico, I'm gonna have problems.

This description hearkens to a common (and commonly dismissed) critique of bilingual education, that if not handled effectively it can result in "illiteracy in two languages." Yet Ellen expresses genuine concerns: If she were to need to return to Mexico, she worries that her Spanish has become too limited from lack of exposure, a linguistically valid fear. At the same time, because her English is nonnative, she is conscious of the potential difficulties of studying and working in an English-dominant environment – also valid concerns.

Like Ellen, Ofelia described her abilities to read and write in English as better than her Spanish, a result of her years as a high school and college student in the U.S. Even so, she expressed a preference for her mother tongue in conversation: "The teachers

always tell me, ‘Do you speak English with your friends?’ I’m like, ‘No.’ ‘Why don’t you speak English with your friends?’ ‘Because I don’t feel the same thing.’” With only a few exceptions (as noted above), this perspective corresponded with that of other participants: While English is certainly useful and even enjoyable, it cannot replace Spanish for the most intimate and heartfelt purposes.

Enclave Community Effects

Language, ethnicity, culture: All intertwine to affect an individual’s identity. But these processes occur in, and are inevitably influenced by, the environments or ecosystems in which the individual spends time. In a longitudinal study of ethnic identity development among Latino young people, Syed, Azmitia, and Phinney (2007) reference Bronfenbrenner’s insistence on connecting the study of individuals with “consideration of the context in which they are embedded” (p. 160). The need to take environmental effects into account has been seen as specifically significant in examining the life courses of mid-childhood migrants: “The local ecology is important in influencing how young immigrants acculturate” (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006, p. 324).

The setting of this study and the place of residence of the large majority of the participants can be accurately described as a low-income urban Latino immigrant enclave, though within the community highly localized conditions vary considerably. In addition, the impact of the enclave community can depend greatly on the individual’s mobility (perceived or real); as seen earlier in this chapter, for example, those participants who formed connections outside the enclave described different social group dynamics than those who stayed closer to home. Although it should be noted that not all

participants were living in areas which could be described as enclaves at the time of the interviews, even those who did not currently reside there were quite familiar with the area and spent considerable time there (e.g., at the college where the study was conducted), and most had lived there for at least part of their childhoods.

For new immigrants, residence in an ethnic enclave or “gateway” community has been seen as having both strongly positive and strongly negative implications. On the negative side, Vigil (2002) describes the urban immigrant enclave as a potentially counter-adaptive influence: “Rather than facilitating an open and fluid adaptation and adjustment to American society, the insulated, isolated, closed community implodes in on itself. Sometimes this kind of settlement fosters a distinctly separatist identity” (p. 104). Grindle (2002) paints a similarly grim picture, observing that young Latinos who reside in “marginalized neighborhoods” are at significantly increased risk of “becoming a member of a gang, having access to drugs, and engaging in criminal or violent activities” (p. 146). Certainly the community of this study suffers from a full share of such woes, a reality which the interview data reveals weighs heavily on participants, who reported having observed the impact of these destructive activities on their neighborhoods, classmates, friends, and even family members.

On the other hand, residence in an enclave has also been seen to provide positive effects. Living among culturally and linguistically familiar peers can reduce the immediate adaptation stress on newcomers, support preservation of the individual’s proficiency on the mother tongue (Cornelius, 2002), and enable young people to access the “material and social capital their communities make available” (Portes and Zhou,

1998, p. 496). The enclave can support a sense of groundedness and belonging, as the bidirectional impact that ecosystems have on each other means that just as the enclave is influenced by its surrounding environment – the dominant-culture community – it also influences that community. Describing the situation of Mexican-origin residents in southern California, Phinney, et al. (2001) observe that this population has “established a pervasive culture that influences the entire area. Therefore it is easier for them to feel that they are part of both their own culture and the larger society” (p. 498). Indeed, the “larger society” of the contemporary U.S. has been strongly impacted by its Latino populations; developments such as the milestone passed a few years ago when Mexican-style salsa began outselling ketchup in the U.S. or the fast-growing presence of Latinos and Latin Americans in music and entertainment provide undeniable evidence that the boundary of the *barrio* is a porous one indeed.

The study community was nonetheless perceived by participants to be quite distinct from the outside society, as described by Ellen:

In here, the community is Hispanic, and it's like being in Mexico. Everyone speaks Spanish, we eat Mexican food, we interact with the same people, people from Mexico, so it's like being in Mexico. [...] Everyone speaks Spanish in this community. Like if I go to the doctor's, there will be someone speaking Spanish. If I go to a store, and with my friends, they speak Spanish.

Ellen's word choice is revealing, in that rather than “here,” she says “in here,” as if the community were an enclosed place. And for Ellen, it seemingly was: When asked how she communicated in her earlier years on those occasions when she left the enclave community – to go downtown for example – she gave a rueful laugh and replied: “I never went downtown.”

Xochitl was one of the few participants who described significant life experiences in the U.S. outside the enclave, in that she attended high school across town. However, making that move was not easy. After having spent the years since her arrival in the familiar surroundings of the enclave, she found entering the new environment disconcerting:

High school came, we went to this school and there was only like five Hispanic students, and the rest were like, White, Indian, Korean, like different races. I was nervous, I still remember, I was really really nervous, because I'm like, "Oh, god, what if, oh...." My mom is like, "Well you already know English, you shouldn't be afraid." But it's just, like, I'm not used to this. It's just a different, new environment. Like a completely different environment.

The degree of distress Xochitl describes here reveals the strong enclave effect of isolating residents from the larger society. She recounted how, as she adapted to her new school, her friends in the enclave community reacted:

They would see me as a completely different person. Even one of them said, "You're so stuck up." And I'm like, "Why?" And she's like, "Because you go to that high school." And I'm like, "That makes me stuck up?" And she's like, "You hang around with White people."

Xochitl describes how her friend, after skirting the issue twice, finally came to the crux of the issue: By consorting with White people, she felt that Xochitl was turning her back on her own community.

Daniel was among the participants who viewed the enclave experience in a mainly positive light. He described the benefits of his community: "I think that one of the good things that happened was that I came here to [suburb X]. So at least I had the advantage of people, of other Spanish speakers." However, Daniel also viewed the enclave as a transitional place rather than a destination:

It's like I come from one place, I've been here through my transition, and then I'm ready to go to another place. I think you just can't get from one place one day and be another person the next day. It takes a process, I think. It's gonna be five years and I think I'm barely, I think now I can get out of [suburb X]. I think [suburb X] is like a place to go through and become part of American society, if you wanna put it that way. It's a bridge.

Carmen expressed a similar view of the community as valued but temporary, a “bridge” between one life and another: “I mean, I love this area and I love the community and whatever, but I'm not gonna be here my whole life, I'm gonna get out of there.”

Xochitl also spoke positively about the enclave effect, though as noted above her position was nuanced:

I liked it just because I was comfortable. I was comfortable around people my own race. Just for the fact that I didn't know English and I had to speak to them, I knew I could talk in Spanish, I felt kind of safe that way.

However, she came to see the drawbacks when she ventured to high school beyond the enclave: “That's when I really realized... I was kind of afraid, or just nervous. I was like, No one here speaks Spanish.”

Participants who voiced negative views of the enclave focused mainly on the closely related issues of language and school. As seen in the discussion of ESL and bilingual education above, participants found that living and studying in a Spanish-speaking environment hindered their efforts to learn English. Some expressed strongly negative views of the use of Spanish at school. Roxana described a teacher in her high school: “I didn't like it because he spoke all Spanish, I think he just came back from Mexico.” Sara saw a connection between substandard schooling and the enclave. She described living in the community as placing her at “a disadvantage,” explaining: “The high school I went to was not a really good school. I don't think they offer good

academic quality.”

As Xochitl discovered when she went off to high school, a long-term effect of living in a linguistically separate enclave ultimately involves the connections a person is able to make with others. No participant made this point better than Ellen, who remarked near the end of a 90-minute interview that after living in the U.S. for ten years, “I think that this is the biggest conversation I have had in English.”

Perspectives on the Immigrant Experience

This section presents those perspectives the participants expressed which reveal their attitudes toward the immigration experience in retrospect, from the standpoint of individuals who have “survived” the most perilous part of the journey and who by many indicators seem well along a path toward successful integration into the larger society (though for those lacking legal documentation, they are acutely aware that such integration implies significant complications over the near and medium terms, a dynamic which is addressed in Chapter Eight). Approaching understanding this process requires consideration of complex and highly interrelated issues including individuals’ overall perceptions of the value of having immigrated, the experience of loss, and the recognition and resolution of cultural and identity shift.

The Dual Frame of Reference and Newcomer Optimism

I usually think, What would have been if I had stayed and lived in Mexico? What would I do, where would I work, how would I think? (Jose)

I think I’ve always been comparing what I have here with what I would have had there. I see, like the possibilities I have here and the possibilities I have in Honduras, and I think that being here is the best fit for me, for what I want in the future. (Lidia)

I have wondered how my personality would have formed if I didn't come here. How would I be different? I think I would be really different. I would be involved maybe in different things. I would have different friends. (Sara)

It would be difficult to improve upon the above quotations as a way of introducing the concept of what has been called the immigrant's "dual frame of reference" (Suárez-Orozco, 1989), a pervasive habit of comparing circumstances in the new setting with those recalled or hypothesized from the country of origin. As discussed in Chapter Five, participants used the expression "over there" repeatedly in their narratives, revealing a way of looking at the present which implied a constant awareness of a broader context, in terms of both macrosystems (the large social and cultural environments, i.e., those of the host and sending countries) and chronosystem (the individual's experience and development over a span of time).

Though participants tended to view their childhoods in the country of origin through decidedly rose-colored lenses (again, as presented in Chapter Five), characterizing their early years as a time of connectedness and liberty, they also (like Lidia) often expressed the belief that their adulthoods "over there" would not have implied nearly so favorable prospects. Carmen offered a fairly representative perspective:

I'm very happy that we came here. I think if I had stayed there, realistically I wouldn't have had the opportunities that I have now. Even if I don't employ them, I know if I want that I can do things, I can go to Peru, I can go anywhere I want, and it's a possibility, whereas there it's more of a dream. Like everybody wants to travel, everybody wants to do things, but realistically speaking the availability of that is very, very small [there], whereas here it's available to anybody who's willing to work for it.

Although participants generally did not visualize their hypothetical un-migrated selves as living in dire poverty or despair, they nonetheless imagined themselves as

having markedly more limited prospects:

I think the opportunities that I have here wouldn't have compared to what I would be right now in Mexico. [...] I probably wouldn't have gone to school. And just dropped my goal of being a teacher, and you know, working with my dad in his businesses. (Marta)

As seen in Chapter Five and elsewhere in the findings chapters, the strong and universal habit among these participants is to view their experiences through the dual frame of reference, a perspective which seems to strongly support a favorable view of their present circumstances, even in the awareness of the unfavorable aspects thereof. This positive perception of immigration, commonly referred to as “newcomer optimism,” has been in wide evidence among immigrants to the U.S. Among the most prolific researchers in the field of immigrant education, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) make the blanket assertion that “most immigrants will find that overall, their gains outweigh their losses” (p. 86). Ultimately, the attitude of those interviewed for this study might be summed up using Carmen’s words: “I’m very happy that we came here.”

Ambiguous Perspectives on Immigration

Although participants’ views on immigration were overall skewed strongly to the favorable, not every “dual frame” comparison favored the host country. Jose characterized Mexico as a cherished place of refuge:

Life over there, it’s, everybody is happy over there for some reason. And when I go over there, it’s like my breath of the year. I just, I get to inhale oxygen for a couple of weeks. I’m happy over there, I don’t have any stress whatsoever.

In this case, however, Jose is not imagining what his life might have been life if he had not migrated, but simply describing his perspective on Mexico as a place to visit. (He admitted that the fact that his trips to Mexico constituted vacations from his everyday life

in the U.S. may have contributed to his perception of life there as stress-free.) Carmen engaged in the more common practice of considering a hypothetical life course in which she never migrated, and offered a more ambiguous perspective:

I'm always saying if we had stayed over there we'd be great people, but we'd be very poor. Whereas if we're here we're very rich but kind of poor people. Like I said, people don't really communicate here that well, you have lot of barriers.

Like Jose, Carmen continues to ascribe positive attributes to Mexico, indicating her sense of the loss of connectedness that she feels her family would have maintained if they had not left. Nonetheless, she also expressed a position which reflects that most prevalent in the interviews: "If I had stayed there, realistically I wouldn't have had the opportunities that I have now."

Throughout their narratives, participants offered ample evidence of their awareness of the "losses" that the immigrant life course implied. Chapter Five, for example, includes a discussion of the sense of unhappiness and deception that in many cases arose of the family decision to migrate. In addition, feelings of loss related to linguistic and cultural changes and the effects of these changes on participants' self-images are presented elsewhere in this chapter. The following two sections address ambiguous and unfavorable views not subsumed within other discussions.

The Sacrificial Generation

As explored in the discussion of the "Motivational Value of Family Struggle" in Chapter Six, participants revealed an awareness of what their parents had given up to provide new opportunities for their children. However, migration also often implies sacrifice for the children, particularly those who are old enough to fully appreciate the

hardships and deprivations the experience entails. Whereas older children may possess a level of maturity that better equips them to handle the stresses of transition, and younger children may be somewhat shielded from those stresses by their parents and older siblings, those in the middle – the mid-child immigrants – can bear the brunt of the burden.

A significant difference between children and parents is, of course, that of volition: Parents choose to migrate, whereas children are compelled. Some participants revealed in retrospect a perception of themselves as a kind of sacrificial generation, their sense of loss not confined to language or culture but to their very childhoods. They need look no further than their younger siblings to see what they might have had: carefree lives, material bounty, citizenship.

The participant who presented as the most acutely aware of this aspect of the immigration experience is Veronica, who described a harrowing ordeal of crossing the border, fully aware of the dangers and protective of her younger sister. (Sara suggested that one reason she had no especially traumatic memory of her own illegal crossing was that her parents and older siblings had protected her from the worst of it.) In her narrative, Veronica repeatedly returned to the theme of her lost childhood:

You grow up there, and people who come out of there grow up so fast. [...] You mature so young. [...] I missed my childhood, because I grew out of it too fast during those years, that now you see me playing with my mom and it's so funny because, I'm to the point where I'm so childish sometimes when I play, because I missed my childhood, I didn't have a childhood, like I was supposed to. [...] I went for, you know, when we moved here, I'm the one that went without a bed for a year, that was sleeping on the floor.

Elsewhere Veronica described her struggle not to be resentful of her younger siblings,

who had little or no memory of “those years”:

Sometimes that’s frustrating, when you see everybody having fun and you didn’t have that fun when you were little. But then I’m like, “You know what, it’s good, they have a childhood, they’re enjoying their childhood, you know?”

Seemingly helpful to Veronica’s acceptance of the situation is her mother’s recognition of what she sustained and attempts to compensate for the loss: “My mom is always there. She’s like, ‘The reason why I’m helping you is because you’re the one that went through the most.’”

Adopting a more dispassionate tone, Andres recounted how he and his siblings were left in the care of relatives when they first arrived in the U.S.: “We managed to take care of ourselves. And we had our sister. So it wasn’t that hard. I don’t mean we were really independent at eleven, but you could say that.” As seen repeatedly in the narratives of both Andres and his brother, and as stated outright by them, each seemed to benefit greatly from the support of the other when facing challenges.

Like Veronica, Carmen described having to take on responsibilities beyond her years:

Up until I was sixteen, I was like the mom to my sister and my brother. I had to grow up very young. It was difficult to relate to the other kids because the other kids, you know, they stayed for after-school basketball and after-school this and that, and I was like, “Oh, no, I can’t, I have to stay home.” I didn’t really have friends, I went to school and then I went home. So I felt kind of isolated from that. I would study in short intervals, between, you know, my dad got home at a certain time, and exactly a half an hour later my mom left for work, and my dad was tired so he would go and rest, and I would have between the time he fell asleep till he woke up and we had to have dinner, I would have that time to study. [...] It was like, the house comes first, your brother and sister come first, and then school and the rest.

Sara described being on the unfortunate other end of the spectrum; rather than

making excessive demands of her, she reported how her parents – immersed in their work and trying to make ends meet in the new setting – largely ignored her: “They didn’t pay attention to me, basically.”

Several participants described how their role in the family became more important during the post-migration period, as they were called upon to help with childcare and housework as well as – after they had learned some English – to help their parents by serving as translators. Taking on a central role in helping the family navigate in the new setting, in particular involving the tasks of translating and language brokering, has been seen to heighten the young person’s sense of familial connectedness (Dorner, Orellana, & Jiménez, 2008, citing Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; and Pyke, 2000) as well as to enhance the child’s respect for parents (Chao, 2006), though others have posited that especially in cases where children have to translate for parents, the family power balance can be disrupted (Menjívar, 2000). This range of possibility was discernable in the interview data.

Most participants reported serving as translators for their parents, and though none expressed particular fondness for the memory, the tone of their descriptions was predominantly neutral. Carmen expressed the strongest views about translating: “I did that a lot. I hated it. Horrible. It’s overwhelming.” Then, however, she went on to offer a nuanced and insightful perspective:

At first it was frightening, it’s difficult to be an eight or nine or ten year old and have to go ask questions like, legitimate questions to professional adults and things like that. I think it kind of humbled them to me. Because when you’re little you look at somebody who’s let’s say, a doctor, and you say, “Wow, they’re a doctor!” There’s an image to that. But speaking to them, and having to translate

for my mom or my dad or whoever, it kind of made me see them as, as like a person, like they have a responsibility to you as well, not just you to them. So now I'm not shy about speaking to anyone, anywhere. Whereas my sister, who never had to translate a word, you know if you tell her, "Go ask the bus driver what stop we need," she completely refuses.

In short order, Carmen progresses from her initial, childish reaction, "I hated it," toward a more mature analysis, which ultimately leads her to the realization that the experience contributed to her development, yielding a tangible benefit: "Now I'm not shy about speaking to anyone, anywhere."

Another participant who described ambiguous perspectives on this theme was Roxana. After describing the pressure of having to translate complex documents related to her mother's accident and other adult concerns, she turned to the empowering outcomes:

Now I feel like I could do a lot of things. Like I feel more confidence because I started a little helping my parents with a lot of stuff. And like right now I feel like I have a big responsibility in the house, helping them around and that's what keeps me growing, and to develop and to have a little bit more knowledge of what's going on, you know that helped me a lot. [...] I think because of all this experience that I've been going through, I think I'm, I grew up like in a different way, I do see a lot of things different.

Experience of Negative Attitudes, Discriminatory Behavior, Racism

The findings of the present inquiry largely contradict those of other studies such as Gonzalez, Plata, Garcia, Torres, and Urrieta (2003), who found that Latino students characterized racism as significant in their experience, and Benmayor (2002), who reported that Mexican American students interviewed in California in 1999 and 2000 "were overpowered by strong memories of discriminatory treatment" (p. 101).

When specifically asked to reflect upon their experiences with discrimination,

participants reported very little such experience. Though some were able (with some prodding) to describe rather mild incidents of perceived discriminatory behavior, they were more likely to explicitly reject racism as an explanation for actions they perceived as unfair or unpleasant, to characterize their teachers as respectful and welcoming, and in general to downplay the significance of racism in their experience.

Daniel presented the most striking exception to this tendency. He described how when he had just arrived in the U.S. he witnessed a woman being treated rudely at the airport, apparently because she did not speak English well. The experience served to deflate his expectations for his new home: “I see that thing and it’s like whoa, so it kind of hit me like it’s not all the happy story.” Daniel went on to describe further:

And I see these people again I see how the people react when you say, I saw this one guy who wanted to talk to me in English, and I didn’t know, and I see the reaction right away, he’s like “Oh, you don’t speak English, oh you’re Mexican,” and he just left. [...] My first impression was that OK this is a great place, but there is the racism that they said there is. There was the racism at that moment. And I think there is still some racism. But it is normal. I don’t know. You can get used to it.

His experience with racism also extended to school:

I went through some teachers like that too, that just cause you were Mexican, or you were Latino, you didn’t speak English that well, they would um, say, they would underestimate you and I had to face that, like two or three times in high school.

In two other examples participants related on the topic of discrimination, the incidents seemed more likely bound in language than ethnicity. In the first, the participant recounted how two families on her street attempted to enroll their children in a school they perceived to be of higher quality in an adjoining district. One family succeeded, the other did not. However, she explained that both families were Mexican, and that those

who did not succeed in convincing school officials to make an exception could not speak English, while the others were adept in the language. In the second, Xochitl and a friend both asked their teacher for a letter of recommendation; her letter was glowing while her friend's was lukewarm. She tried to explain the discrepancy: "Maybe it was just because the vocabulary was different, or maybe it's just the way my personality is different from my friend, even though we're both Mexican."

The above constitute all of the explicit references made in the interviews to perceived discriminatory behavior, though in other instances participants' remarks reveal their awareness of prejudicial attitudes in the larger society, such as when high school officials seem to assume that certain students are not college-bound, a perception reported by one participant. The same sense can be inferred from Ellen's contemplation on the ethnic labels she applies to herself:

If I'm with my friends, I can say, well, Mexican, but if it's someone else, I think I would say Hispanic or Latina, just not to say a specific country. Some people are sometimes, "Oh, that country sucks," or, racism, so I'd decide to say Hispanic, I think, to someone else.

Regarding school, participants' perceptions of their teachers' attitudes was overwhelmingly positive. This is perhaps a function of selecting a study sample based partly on academic success; teachers are inherently well disposed toward eager students, a point not lost on Jose: "The teachers' attitudes were good toward me because I was a good student and I was learning, so they didn't really get upset or like kind of push me aside because I didn't fully know the language."

Lidia and Gerardo offered similar appraisals:

Actually I never felt like any discrimination or anything like that ever. I never did. I don't know if it was the way that we were, because my grandma always um told us to have respect, things like that, even with other children and stuff, so I really don't remember ever feeling like "Oh, I don't belong." In school, I never felt that way. [...] They don't judge you, you know, by who you are, what color you are, it doesn't matter. (Lidia)

They were always very friendly and they, they kind of felt that like moving from one country to another and learning a new language was a challenge. So they, I guess they were always being helpful and trying to make us feel like, we had to learn the language and start getting more comfortable with speaking the language and meeting people from here, and kind of integrating with our, with this country. (Gerardo)

When pressed further to characterize whether he thought his teachers ever had "a bad attitude" toward him because of his background, Gerardo continued:

No, never. I got a few teachers every now and then that they felt kind of, I guess the frustration of not being able to fully communicate. But I never felt that it was because of my background or nationality or anything, it was more because they couldn't communicate with me. But I guess that same thing could happen with anybody, so I didn't feel that it was personal, or because of my background.

Roxana closely echoed Gerardo's perspective:

One of my history classes, I guess it was just frustrating for her, it'd be like, "Oh my god, I have this kid, and I have to leave her behind." [...] You would see her like going, "Ah!" [rolls eyes] like "What should I do?" But it was not only me, it was a few other kids, which it makes me feel like I wasn't the only one. Yeah, but not all the teachers had a different attitude. I think everybody was just helpful. And trying to understand the situation and what was going on.

In one incident in which a racist motive for a teacher's behavior seems an obvious possibility, the participant expressly rejected this supposition. As described in the discussion of ESL classes above, Jose observed what he perceived to be condescending and unfair behavior from a teacher who was in the habit of treating her students as if they were "mentally retarded." However, when asked if he believed racism was a factor in her behavior, Jose responded:

I don't know whether she was racist. I don't think so. Just rather ignorant. Which at the end they're both stemming from the same problem, racism and ignorance, but I don't know. Maybe the fact that she thought that we couldn't speak English just made her.... I don't know, I don't know what was going through her mind.

Jose's refusal here to arrive at a conclusion without firm evidence is laudable, and typical of his primary rhetorical style, which is imbued with a kind of scientific logic. (Even concerning his personal history, he was reluctant to make educated guesses. When asked about his attitude toward leaving Mexico as a child, for example, he replied: "I would have to ask my mother. Cause she says that I didn't want to leave, but I don't have much of a recollection regarding this.")

Alienation, Individuation, Integration: Mid-Childhood Immigrant Identity

In each interview, the participant was asked to consider a quotation taken from the memoir of Polish-born mid-childhood immigrant Eve Hoffman (1989), reflecting upon the early days after her family's arrival, when for her and her younger sister going to school meant entering "a roomful of unknown faces, with names that make us strangers to ourselves" (1989, p. 105). This mostly failed to provoke the spark of recognition I expected – a telling detail in itself – but the response it did evoke was something even more interesting: empathy.

Considering the image of Hoffman as a young immigrant child who suddenly finds herself in a world where everything, including her own name, has changed, Andres observed with a note of resignation: "I've been that kid for so many years now." Although he did not see his experience as being as extreme as Hoffman's, the quote brought Gerardo to reflect on the significance of his home environment in preserving his

sense of self. Using the Spanish pronunciation of his name, he remarked: “Being able to go back to my family, and go back to being me, *Gerardo*, it helps.”

Carmen reported that because of the enclave community effect, she did not feel the way Hoffman described until much later:

Not when I first came here. Maybe more now, actually. Because when I got here mostly everybody spoke Spanish, all the teachers spoke Spanish, the principal spoke Spanish, so I didn’t have a problem with that. But now, now I feel more like a stranger to myself because I want to be one way, or I know I should behave one way, but now it’s a struggle between what I should do and what I want to do.

Though the familiar surroundings blunted for her much of the immediate shock that Hoffman experienced, Carmen found that over the longer term they shared some common ground.

Francisco professed not to share Hoffman’s perspective, but offered a sympathetic analysis to explain why:

I would say she had more experiences in Poland where now she kind of feels like she lost herself, who she was before, but myself, I would say that since I’ve lived here now longer than I did there, that I’m just used to my life here.

What is striking in Francisco’s response is not his insight into Hoffman’s situation as much as his immediate assumption that he understands her feelings. And his assumption is entirely on target: Hoffman was thirteen when she immigrated while Francisco was only eight. His intuitive analysis aligns with what other participants observed about effect of age on arrival for mid-childhood immigrants: Younger newcomers experience a less traumatic transition.

The prevailing response was, after a thoughtful pause, to agree that it was easy to understand how a person in Hoffman’s situation would feel that way. What became clear

was that even if they did not share her feelings exactly, interviewees saw common ground and common cause with Hoffman, their peer in a fellowship whose existence most had only come to perceive as a result of their participation in this study.

Thus, what participants' responses to Hoffman reveal is not only their empathy with her, but their recognition that mid-childhood immigrants constitute a class apart, a class to which they themselves belong. Daniel expressed this conviction most forthrightly, referring to the interviewer's announcement about the study in his English class:

You see how [other Latino students] act, the culture is different from my culture, how I used to be, and then I didn't really feel into the other category with the people that are just... It's a moment that you just feel lost [...]. It's like you don't know where you belong. And I remember when you went into the classroom and you said "Have you heard about this 'generation 1.5'?" It's like, that's the age eight to 15 when they come here." I actually felt happy when you said that, I felt, "Well, I fit somewhere!" It's like, maybe I'm 1.5, but at least now I have, now people are trying to look into that specific generation. I was like, actually, that's why I wanted to come, cause I was like, "Whoa, they take an interest in our group."

What is revealed here is that Daniel and the other participants had accepted (in some cases embraced) the perception – entirely new to them – that they were members of a group with particular and collective experiences. The implication of this is profound: In the sum of their experiences, they recognized a shared identity which they could not even name.

Alienation and Loss: Life in the "Existential Void"

Participants described the experience of migration in mid-childhood in various ways, all of which fit within the larger category named by Gerardo as "a whole life-changing experience." One aspect of the experience was a sense of loss, an awareness

that something has been left behind, irrevocably changed. In some cases this was felt as a kind of visceral loss, described in childlike terms and seemingly defying logic.

Alvarez (1998) described this sentiment after migrating: “For weeks that soon became months and years, I would think in this way. What was going on right this moment back home?” (19).

Asked to describe her feelings about Mexico after not visiting for a decade – half her life – Roxana replied: “I do miss it over there. Cause it’s not the same. Christmas is not the, I don’t like Christmas here. Even though I’ve had more Christmases here.” For those raised in Latin America, few notions better conjure the sense of childhood than Christmas; for Roxana, this is what comes to mind when she is asked to describe the place that she left behind, the place that was, in fact, taken from her against her will.

Andres and Gerardo felt so acutely this loss of grounding, this feeling of having the rug of their home culture pulled out from under them, that they decided to return to Mexico after high school. Gerardo explained their reasoning: “We felt like we had missed part of our teenage years, like a period of our life, from being here.” The brothers’ attempt to regain what had gone missing was ultimately unsuccessful, as Gerardo reported:

We always thought, once we go back to Mexico everything is gonna be great, because all that cultural part that we were missing here. It’s gonna be there, so.... We felt like we wanted that experience. But when we got that and spent a couple of months there, we didn’t find that.

What they found instead was that their time in the U.S. had changed them in ways that made it impossible for them to slip seamlessly back into their old lives and pick up their old friendships and customs. “Our ideas had changed when we came here, so those

kind of things didn't click for us anymore," Gerardo reported.

Carmen described facing similar challenges. Within a larger discussion of the differences between herself and a younger sibling, she offered the almost off-handed observation, "I'm torn between the cultures." The combination of her word choice and the flippancy of the comment suggest simultaneously the gravity of the conflict and her comfortable intimacy with it – a combination also seen in the stories told by Gerardo and others.

This combination is a defining characteristic of the participants in this study, whose narratives revealed an acute awareness of the forces competing to influence their identities, yet at the same time a bare minimum of the sense of urgency, distress, or confusion that one might expect as a consequence. (This is not to suggest that participants did not report feeling uncertain and confused; however, these feelings were rarely connected with the issue of cultural affiliation or identity, but rather arose of more prosaic [though admittedly related issues] such as communication, schoolwork, and finances, all of which are addressed elsewhere in the findings.)

From the moment the immigrant child enters his new school, he discovers that he has left behind any vestige of a world in which he feels at home. Participants repeatedly described this in terms similar to Daniel's recollection: "There's a moment when you kind of feel, you feel like you don't belong to any place, there's a moment when you as a human being you feel like, where do I fit?"

Xochitl described feeling apart even among her friends, a feeling which was in part connected to her undocumented immigration status, which she kept secret:

I always feel like I've had at certain times in my life people who, even though I'm friends with them, they see me as something different. They're like, "You're not one of us. You're not completely part of our group."

Jose expressed this sentiment in equally emphatic though more scholarly, even philosophical terms:

You're seen as sort of an alien object. [...] See, it's kind of an existential void, because when you're here, you're Mexican, and when you go back to Mexico you're American. So you don't fit anywhere. It's sort of, it's a vacuum.

Not only alienated in the new setting, Jose's biculturality set him apart from peers on both sides of the border. Like Jose, Andres spent time in Mexico as a young adult, and concurred: "When we're here we're like, OK, we're Mexicans, but then when we're over there, like, 'Oh, no, they're from another country.' It was kinda weird."

Perhaps one reason that mid-childhood immigrants so readily perceive common cause with each other, then, is that they find little commonality elsewhere. Participants described themselves as occupying a kind of "damned-if-you-do-and-damned-if-you-don't" cultural position. Having struggled to acculturate in a highly diverse high school, Xochitl found that she faced new conflicts with peers in her community:

You always get those friends, they're like, "Well you try to act White." Or from the other side, too, "Well, you're not like every Hispanic, they tell me. You're not like the rest of the Hispanics." I wanna say like, "What do you mean by that?" [...] But, yeah, I get it from both sides.

And there is no going back. Participants reported the perception that, having chosen a life straddling "both sides" (or at least, having found themselves there), they no longer have the option of returning to some simpler state. As Nadia explained: "I don't wanna go back, because if I go back, they're gonna look at me just the way they looked at me when I came here. Oh, she's from over there, you know, the gringa, whatever."

Marta was one of the handful of participants who experienced an extended return to her country of origin after having begun to transition to life in the U.S., a period recalled with little fondness:

When you come from the United States and you go to your town, they look at you differently and they kind of see you differently, even though you were born there. And even in schools, you know, they thought I was, I was really a joke to them. And they were trying to do, they were trying to put that in my mind, when I knew that that wasn't true. But I never really spoke out about it.

Marta, like other participants who returned to their country of origin, found that if anything the transition back to the old environment was more problematic than the new – they no longer fit in the monolingual, monocultural setting they once called home.

Unlike Marta, when Gerardo and Andres returned to live in Mexico, they went as young adults. Describing their decision to come back to their home in the U.S., Andres explained that they simply wanted to “be with our family, be with our friends, be in the in the town that I guess we grew up in.” Andres went on to make a distinction which is central to understanding the mid-childhood immigrant, that for a child “from 11 to 18 is a completely different period” than the years of early childhood. After they had spent those crucial years in the U.S., Andres concluded, “You kinda have some memories, so it was like no, this is more like our house now. Even though we still have like part of Mexico in us, in memories, it's not the same.”

Given that acculturation and assimilation (like language learning) are highly affected by the individual's age on arrival, it is common within immigrant families for significant cultural differences not only between parents and children but between younger and older children. This is in fact a defining characteristic of mid-childhood

immigrants: Whereas younger children form identities grounded primarily in the new setting and adults carry their identities more fully formed from the old setting, those in the middle occupy what many perceive to be disputed territory. Typical of the participants, Carmen described her younger sister as being more assimilated than she was herself. “I have more, I have I guess the values of Mexico, and then I have the culture here. And she just has the values of America.”

As mixed-culture or between-culture individuals, participants seemed to face the loss of singular cultural identity with aplomb, if not enthusiasm. Immediately after describing himself as occupying a cultural “existential void,” Jose went on to assert, “I wouldn’t call it a crisis, because I don’t care what other people perceive me as.... I’m more of a world citizen.” A possible explanation for participants’ apparent acquiescence to the demise of their monoculturalism may be, as Jose suggests in his case, that they perceive the benefit to be worth the cost.

Value Placed on Diversity, Cultural Curiosity

When Jose refers to himself as a “world citizen,” he conjures an image – of a cosmopolitan, open-minded, diverse individual – which participants repeatedly held up as their preferred self-perception. This is an identity which mid-childhood immigrants recognize as distinguishing them from people who live within a single cultural frame. And a self-image which is defined by cultural diversity seems to be a prize that they believe is worth the loss of their earlier monocultural identity regardless of the conflicts and uncertainty it may incur. Hoffman (1989) described the transformation following her mid-childhood migration as decidedly additive: “I am being remade, fragment by

fragment, like a patchwork quilt; there are more colors in the world than I ever knew” (p. 220).

Nearly all participants remarked upon the degree of ethnic and cultural diversity in the U.S., an observation often made in the context of contrasting it with the country of origin. For those who did not enter schools within the Latino enclave community on their arrival, first impressions were typically marked by a recognition of the diversity of their new environment:

My school in Mexico was small, maybe one class of each grade, so everybody really knew each other, and here when I came here, to elementary school, it was just like so many, such a big school with so many kids and different, you know, different races, you know, Chinese, African American, white, all these different people in the same classroom, it was very weird for me. (Marta)

Though she was at first nonplussed by the diversity she found in her high school, Xochitl soon adapted and came to value the experience: “I think it made me improve myself in every aspect. Language-wise, personality, the way I think, stuff like that. It really helped me out.” She characterized her experience in this multicultural setting as a path to personal growth that she would not have been able to achieve otherwise:

I became a more open person. [...] I was always afraid, you know, even talking to a White person. I would just get so shy, because I just wasn’t used to it, and now it’s like I’m more open to it, and I’m able to talk to different people, you know, I’m more comfortable, I have the confidence to do it.

In general, participants professed a strong sense of interest in and tolerance for other cultures, expressing the belief that cultural diversity was a positive characteristic of the new setting and a trait they saw as valuable in themselves. Xochitl provided an example of this:

I've always been interested in cultures, though, even if I see a person from like, Turkey or somewhere, you know, I make conversation, cause I'm interested in their culture, what it's like. It's just interesting to me. Experiencing different people, talking to them, a different environment.

The value placed on cultural diversity, and admiration and curiosity toward other cultures, arose again and again in the interviews. Even after undergoing the wrenching experience of mid-childhood immigration, participants expressed their desires to live in other places, to continue learning about new peoples and cultures. Ofelia spoke of her dreams of going to China and the Middle East; Carmen outlined a plan to travel and work in Peru. Of course, dreams of living abroad are common among many young people. The difference is that mid-childhood immigrants know on the most visceral level what such dreams entail.

Reflecting on how the immigration experience affected him, Jose described his sense of himself:

I think being here makes me a much more open minded person. I'm more liberal, I give more thought to world matters, politics, philosophy. I'm more of a world person instead of a regional person. So it certainly has broadened my intellectual abilities, or ambitions.

Like Jose, Andres spent a length of time in Mexico during his college years, and was able to make informed comparisons of his life in the U.S. with the life he saw his relatives living in Mexico, a comparison which did not favor the relatives: "They were like trapped in the same place there, and now we felt like we did something more with our lives.... They're family and we get along, but now it's just they're stuck in this town...." His brother Gerardo described how their sojourn back to Mexico changed their perspective on the U.S.:

We decided to come back, but then our whole mind was different, we now felt that the experience of being here in the U.S. was a very good opportunity for us. Like here we had people from all over the world, different cultures, a lot of things that we could learn from that. I think the whole idea of... like, here in the U.S., you have different people, different minorities and people from different backgrounds living in the same place, even though their cultural backgrounds are from all over the world. But then in Mexico you kind of have a lot of the same ideas, even though people have their own opinions and their own points of views, we felt that people only have a certain point of view, and we felt that it was very conservative and it didn't, it wasn't really open-minded, so when we came back here we thought that we... it kind of opened our eyes into seeing that here, and seeing the benefits we could get from that.

Roxana shared the sense that immigration transformed her into “a different person” with a broader perspective:

I think that really helps me, and I think I learned a lot of things ... if I would have been over there maybe I wouldn't have had this experience. Maybe I wouldn't have met other people, other points of view, or another culture. So I'm pretty sure that I would a different person from what I am.

Echoing Roxana's perspective, Lidia observed, “I don't think I would have met the kind of people I've met here if I had stayed over there.”

Although some participants expressed the belief that they were no longer able to relate well with those in their birth culture, others described themselves as adept in both cultures. Lidia related how when she and her sister went to visit family in Honduras, their relatives were surprised at their ability to adapt to local expectations:

They think of you like, “Oh my god, oh they're coming from the US,” you know, and then they see how we act, because my mom, like I said my mom is very, very strict, and she said, “You girls start acting any different than who you are, then you'll have problems with me.” So every time we go there people are like, um, “Why do you girls act like this? Cause you girls don't act like other people that come from over there.”

At her mother's insistence, the girls worked to retain a sense of their birth culture, with apparent success. Maintaining adeptness in navigating the culture of his country of origin

was also important to Jose, and like Lidia, his efforts were supported by periodic visits:

I've been going back almost every 2 years, well, since I graduated from high school every year. And I do share a lot of things with the Mexican culture. I talk to my friends and I'm like "Hey what are you guys doing? How you guys been?" And they recognize me and I recognize them. I even visit old teachers from back in the day. But I don't feel as alienated from their culture. ... I feel more alienated [from US culture] due more to a taste than culture. Well, I guess it's gonna be pretty much the same, taste and culture. Cause, well, I don't follow American sports, not really, and everybody's crazy – "Are you a Cubs or a Sox fan?" And I'm like, "Neither." And football, oh my god, really not interested. [...] Music-wise, I hate Britney Spears and all that crap.... I think I do actually feel slightly closer to the Mexican side. I think I'm definitely more comfortable speaking Spanish and, uh, with my Spanish friends, or Mexican friends, or Latin American friends. I'm more at ease.

Interestingly, it was Jose – who by dint of his idiomatic English, his demeanor as a typical highly-achieving U.S. college student, and his academic accomplishments (near completion of his bachelor's degree) could be described as among the more acculturated of the participants – who most firmly asserted that he felt "more comfortable" with his birth culture. This characteristic was not unique, suggesting that strong acculturation to a new setting does not necessarily presuppose increased distance from the culture of origin. Indeed, some individuals seem quite capable of spanning a rather wide cultural range. To some extent, this is probably dependent upon ongoing access to cultural influences from both sides; possible outcomes occurring when this access is curtailed – as in the case of undocumented immigrants – is explored in the following chapter.

Use of Ethnic and National Identity Labels

As explored in the previous section, arriving at a defined sense of identity can be a tricky business for individuals who come of age under two (or more) compelling and

largely exclusive cultural influences. This enterprise is complicated further for Latinos, whose ethnicity situates them in what Smith (2002) describes as “an ambivalent, ‘in-between’ position [...]. They are not ‘mainstream American’ white, but they are neither in nor completely excluded from the most stigmatized groups, blacks and Puerto Ricans, nor are they completely excluded from the ‘white ethnic’ immigrant groups” (p. 113).

When asked which terms they feel comfortable using to describe themselves, most participants offered responses which indicated two things: (a) They did not find the issue to be of pressing concern, and (b) the terms they chose represented some attempt to capture the polarity and ambivalence of their position. Regarding the first of these, participants did not give the impression that they found the issue irrelevant but merely lacking urgency; in fact, all were able to readily offer their perspectives, and it was clear in many cases that they had given the topic some thought. This in itself has been seen as a kind of evidence of immigrant adaptation, as in the assertion of Gans (1999, with reference to Alba, 1990 & Waters, 1990) that “ethnic self-naming or self-identification is usually accompanied by continued acculturation and assimilation” (p. 165).

To the question of how he identifies himself, Andres responded:

I never really, um, thought like an American or like someone from this country, it was a point that I didn't really want to feel as Mexican as other people I guess. As other immigrants. But then at the same time I always felt like that's who I am.

What appears at first to be a somewhat noncommittal, even vague reply in fact reveals several interesting underlying assumptions, assumptions which seemed to obtain among other responses as well. First, Andres refers specifically to an “American” and then a

“Mexican” identity, but then he makes a shift to the term “immigrants,” suggesting an internalized sense that these are three distinct classes: the monocultural American and Mexican versus that which is marked by both, the immigrant. The second assumption evident in Andres’ response is that an individual’s identity is to some degree an inevitability, determined by forces outside his control: “I always felt like that’s who I am.” His third assumption is, however, that he sees identity also as involving conscious choice: “I didn’t really want to feel as Mexican as other people.” Being Mexican, he implies, is to some degree a function of preference, of what he wants. (The role of choice in identity is pursued further in the following section.)

Regardless of the degree to which they embraced or resisted a “bicultural” identity, all participants expressed an awareness of the bipolarity of influences at work on them. Carmen offered a nuanced perspective:

I would say I’m Mexican American. I’m bicultural. I’m not entirely that but I’m not entirely this either. I feel like I have an obligation to both places. Like my roots are in Mexico, and I have to honor them, in the person that I become, the things that I do. But also I’m... here. [shrugs] So... I don’t know.

Carmen’s response is typical of others in a key regard: Her musing reveals that the issue is not settled. When asked specifically, “Is it good to be bicultural?” she extends the question: “I don’t know. Does that make you less of—? I don’t know. That’s a good question. I mean, it’s good to be bicultural, but does either culture suffer, because you’re bicultural?” Though Carmen has no pat answer for the question, she makes clear that she feels it is worth consideration.

In most cases, participants expressed a sense that the question of identity was not a settled issue. Daniel compared his perspective on arriving in the U.S. with his current

position: “Back then I would say I’m a Mexican, right now I would say I would consider myself Chicano.” Asked what he believed caused him to switch to the second term, which is associated with a Mexican American movement, Daniel replied: “Cause I’m not really fit into one category and I’m not in the other side either. It’s like, I’m in the middle.”

All participants used terms related to their country of origin, with nearly all adding “American” if not immediately following then soon after. In a couple of cases, the immediate response was “100% Mexican,” though even in these instances the individual went on to acknowledge the undeniable influence of spending their formative years in the U.S. The “100%” claim seemed to serve as a way of honoring a heritage that they recognized as altered.

Not surprisingly, among the most ostensibly acculturated participants could be discerned a tendency to highlight their connection to the country of origin. Asked to put a name to his identity, Jose responded:

In a cultural sense? I’d say Mexican. Although I do have the American nationality, I don’t share much of its ideologies or politics. In a way I do distance myself from that American connotation, at least the Republican, Bush connotation, that Bush has given us for the last eight years. When I meet people from another country I’m like, “Oh yeah, I’m Mexican. And I just happen to speak an OK English.”

In addition to honoring his home culture on its own merits, Jose perceives a political advantage to embracing a “Mexican” identity. On the other hand, perhaps nothing reveals Jose’s internalizing an “American nationality” more than his wish to conceal this fact when he meets people from other countries.

Although Xochitl had, unlike most of her peers, made a conscious effort to leave

the ethnic enclave and to immerse herself in a high school environment strongly marked by multiculturalism, and although she described herself as frequenting a social group comprised mostly of non-co-ethnics, and although to even a careful observer she would be nearly indistinguishable from a native-born student, her description of herself was at first unequivocal: "I'm 100% Mexican." Like Jose, however, she immediately set to qualify this claim:

No, I'm a Mexican woman growing up in America, who grew up in America. That's how I would describe myself. You know, I know a lot of people who say, "I'm a Mexican American, because they brought them little here and they're growing up here." But I don't... identify myself with that, you know, I feel like, "Yes, I'm Mexican, but I'm here growing up." Maybe like in 30 years I'll be like "Yes, I came from Mexico, I grew up here," but it doesn't change the fact that I'm from Mexico, so, it just stays the same.

Xochitl described herself as acutely conscious of how others in her own group viewed her identity choices, reflecting an underlying awareness of what Phinney, et al. (2001) refer to as "ascribed ethnicity, that is, one's ethnicity as perceived by others" (p. 496). While those outside her ethnic group made certain assumptions about her, so did her ostensible peers. She described how her friends from the enclave community would react to the changes they perceived in her behavior:

They're like, "Oh, you're really nice, we had the wrong idea about you." And I'm like, "Why?" And they're like, "Because you talk to White people. You're not like, Hispanic." And I'm like, "How am I not Hispanic?" It's like, "You act White." And I'm like, "How can you say a person acts White?" You can't, it's just like something.... A lot of people tell me that. Last semester, my Hispanic friends, they're like, "Oh, come out to eat with us." And we're all sitting down and they're like, "Why do you act so White? Why do you hang around with all the White people?" And I'm like, "Where is this coming from?"

Though her choices were different from Xochitl's, Ellen also articulated an awareness of how one's social environment influences identity:

All my life I've been saying that I'm Mexican, because I was born in Mexico, but I think I'm more used to living in the United States. But because we live in the Hispanic community, I still think I'm Mexican. Because my friend's moms are Mexican, all of them are Mexican, and I don't have the experience to interact with White people or African Americans or someone from other countries. So I think mostly Mexican. A little bit from here.

Ellen's description posits a remarkable complexity, a construct resembling a set of Russian dolls, each nesting within the next: She is Mexican, but more accustomed to living in the U.S., but within the U.S. she is more accustomed to the Mexican enclave community in the U.S., but as such unable to entirely escape the influence of the larger society, an aspect of identity she succinctly denotes as "from here."

Regarding the relationship between the enclave and larger society, Ellen's and Xochitl's use of the descriptor "White" are revealing. This term was used throughout the interviews, as participants (and those they quoted in their narratives) commonly referred to the European-origin U.S. population as "White" and to a lesser degree "Americans." Use of the second term suggests the existence of a club to which the speaker does not (or does not yet) belong, while use of the first indicates a degree of separateness felt between Latinos and non-Latinos of European background. Whether Whites are mentioned admiringly or disparagingly, the distinction is clear. The use of the term White is perhaps a mere convenience, as most Spanish speakers consider "gringo" pejorative (despite the indifference of most gringos to the term), and "anglo" is not commonly used in this community. Whatever the reason, the use of the term "White" is clearly not meant to denote skin color, as several of the participants who used the term to distinguish between themselves and non-Latinos were themselves of very light complexion.

Most participants expressed some awareness of ongoing debates over the use of

ethnic categories such as Latino and Hispanic, though they revealed little investment in the debate. Marta was hesitant to place herself into any category:

I've never thought about it. I mean, I really don't have... [pause] as ethnic background? Or as a person? [laughs] I don't know, I mean as ethnicity, I mean, I'm Mexican. But as a person, I don't know, maybe I just don't like to put labels on things? I'm not sure. [laughs] Hispanic. Hispanic, um, Latina... either or. It really doesn't matter which one of those I use. I mean when I have to check something when it's Hispanic or Latino or whatever, it really doesn't, I never really pay close attention to those things.

Like Marta, Ellen viewed this kind of choice as one imposed by others: "I think Hispanic and Latina are the same thing, so if the paper says Latino, I put Latino, if the paper says Hispanic, I put Hispanic." The interviewer pressed further, asking, "But if someone asks you, you don't say 'I'm Latina' or 'I'm Hispanic'?" Ellen laughed, replying: "If someone asks me, I think I would say the first thing that comes to mind. Because I really think it's the same thing."

Roxana revealed a similar lack of urgency in her comments about self-labeling: "I usually use Mexican, but I wouldn't mind saying I'm a Latina, or Hispanic, or... it's the same. But yeah, more Mexican because it's just the label that you're from Mexico."

In nearly all cases, choices about identity labels and specific descriptors are found to be flexible and unsettled. They are subject to outside influences such as peer pressure and paperwork requirements. They are also often situational, determined to some degree by the audience or setting in which they are used.

In their readiness to engage the identity question and their seeming ease with the concept, however, participants reveal above all the sense that for them this is a salient issue: Part of being an immigrant is confronting choices. Despite feelings of loss and

closeness to their countries of origin, nearly all described themselves as being incontestably connected to the U.S. as well. But ultimately, they recognized in themselves an identity apart from both places: That of the immigrant.

The participant with the shortest experience in the new setting, Ofelia, offered a description of the competing influences on her identity:

Aunque soy mexicana, y estoy muy orgullosa de ser mexicana, y me encanta mi país, yo veo mi vida en estados unidos. [...] Y no importa si estoy aquí o allá, no voy a dejar de ser mexicana. (Though I am Mexican, and I'm very proud of being Mexican, and I love my country, I see my life in the U.S. [...] And it doesn't matter if I'm here or there, I won't stop being Mexican.)

But, Ofelia clarified, there was something in her which transcended either country:

A Mexican girl, with a little bit of American girl too. Un poquito de americana, con sueños sin limitaciones... pero siempre con eso de atrás de mi, con lucha. No importa en que país esté, no importa en que idioma sea, no importa en que continente, siempre con tratar de luchar. (A little bit of American, with dreams without limits... but always with that behind me, with struggle. It doesn't matter what country I'm in, it doesn't matter what continent, always trying to struggle.¹⁶)

Individuation and Choice: Distinguishing Self from "Other" Immigrants

As seen throughout the presentation of findings in this chapter, the development of identity involves both passively received and actively selected elements. Certain characteristics are undeniably the result of genetics or of externally imposed environmental/experiential circumstances, forces over which individuals exert little or no control. But participants also described making active choices which affected their identity development: decisions about social affiliations and settings, habits and

¹⁶ The Spanish words "lucha" and "luchar" are noun and verb forms, respectively, commonly translated in English as "struggle" or "fight." However, the sense here encompasses a meaning closer to "fight to get ahead."

activities, even choices about specific personality and behavioral attributes. Part of this active process is necessarily the rejection of undesired choices.

In telling their stories, participants expressed in many instances an abiding sense that they were “different” from their peers. They described clear distinctions between themselves and others of similar backgrounds, highlighting the choices they (and their families) had made and contrasting those choices with other possible paths they might have taken, as illustrated in the lives of the “others” in their examples. By specifying the choices they rejected, individuals reveal much about what they value.

Awareness of the role of individual choice in relational and environmental influences is evident in Nadia’s observation:

In school you have to distinguish the good and bad friendships. The good friendships, they’re gonna give you good advice, and bad friendships they’re gonna go with gangs and drugs, go a different way. If you have good communication with your mom and parents, you avoid that, and you try to go around the situation. ‘Cause when I was in high school, I had a friend that was like, “Oh, you wanna try this drug?” And I’m like, “No, thank you.” “Oh, but it’s good!” “No, thank you!”

To some degree, this mechanism is evident in what participants say about members of their own families. As seen in the discussion of how family members influence college planning in Chapter Six, participants held up relatives as making life choices they themselves intended to avoid: Lidia spoke of troubled older siblings, Francisco of underachieving cousins. Veronica, Ellen, Carmen, and Xochitl all vowed not to follow familiar patterns of abandoning their educational plans due to marriage and pregnancy. Ellen summed up the sentiment rather emphatically:

It's my dream to become someone different from the rest of my family, who has done nothing, they haven't studied, they're just working, forty hours a week and just pay the bills, and live the routine.

As noted previously in this chapter, Daniel made a point of distinguishing himself from his peers in regard to his “combative” character, his tendency to push back against teachers who underestimated his abilities: “But some of the people don't have that kind of character, so when they say, ‘You're not capable of doing anything, you're not capable of having this class,’ they're like ‘Oh, OK.’”

The sense of difference was in some cases accompanied by a degree of wonder at its origins. Xochitl expressed uncertainty as to whether her differentness was universal or merely distinguished her from her co-ethnics: “I do notice that maybe I am a little different, I don't know if you would say different Mexican or just different.” She continued by musing about whether her difference might be due to regional variation in Mexico:

Maybe because of the way I grew up in a different place of Mexico. But even [my boss] sometimes he tells me, like, you know, “There are different types of Mexican people.” And I'm like, “Well, I think there are different types of every race.” And I came to understand that now. And now I see why people maybe look at me different sometimes, even my own friends.

Her response to her boss is a subtle but firm refutation of the bias implied in his remark, and in it she discovers an insight into herself: Regardless of the cause, even those who know her best view her as “different.”

As seen in the previous section, Andres' comment, “being Mexican here is not something I wanna do” reveals a belief that “being Mexican” is to some extent a function of choices, such as that of which sport to play. Choosing football over soccer was not

merely an athletic decision but one entwined with identity. Even an emotional connection, he suggests, is a matter of choice: “I didn’t really want to feel as Mexican as other people.”

In saying “being Mexican here is not something I wanna do,” Andres also reveals an awareness (and perhaps internalization) of bias against Mexicans in the larger society, as also (probably) evidenced in Xochitl’s boss’s “There are different types of Mexican people.” Sara provided further evidence of not only this bias but also – possibly – some degree of internalization of it: “The people around me they didn’t go to school and they were part of the stereotype that Mexicans are ignorant and Mexicans are this, dahdahdah, and that gave me a push to break that stereotype.” Rather than refute the anti-learning stereotype, Sara makes the choice to prove it wrong by pursuing a degree.¹⁷

The notion that her peers were hostile to learning also arose in Xochitl’s account:

My Hispanic friends used to hang around in the student union. And I would never go there just because they would cut class just to stay there. And I’m like, I’m not gonna do that. I’m going to class.

The high value that participants place on education and career aspirations was evident in remarks in which they distinguished themselves from those who they perceived to value those things less. Delineating his perspective on his co-ethnics in the U.S., Andres explained:

¹⁷ The question of whether the instances described in this paragraph constitute compelling evidence of awareness/internalization of anti-Mexican bias is by no means settled. I would posit – on the basis of extensive personal experience living abroad combined with similarly extensive observation of other immigrants – that adaptation to a new culture is nearly always accompanied by adoption of a critical “outsider” perspective on the home culture, a perspective which is not viewed as unwelcome by those who hold it.

I think they have a hard time to um believe that they can do something besides just high school, and you know, “I just wanna be a nurse, and a PE teacher, something not as difficult.” They don’t say, “Oh, I want to be a doctor. I want to be a lawyer, I want to do something more.” So I guess, I don’t feel really attached to those ideas, with that background. So even though I feel Mexican, I don’t feel the type of Mexican that’s more common here.

The preference for “safe” career choices is of course common among students of working class backgrounds (this researcher being Exhibit A), but from Andres’ perspective this becomes conflated with a feature of Mexican immigrant identity, one which he rejects.

Reflecting on the year he and his brother spent in Mexico after high school,

Gerardo also saw a connection between low aspirations and culture:

They were very different from us. Their whole, the culture was different. We found it very interesting that people could live all their lives doing the same thing, and not trying to aspire for something. Kind of, our ideas had changed when we came here, so those kind of things didn’t click for us anymore.

Female participants expressed strong opinions regarding what they saw as cultural expectations for women which place marriage and having children ahead of education and career aspirations. Carmen and Ellen expressed their desires to differentiate themselves from their peers using remarkably similar language. Ellen stated:

I want to be different, I want to be independent and not depend on my husband. Now I’m not pregnant, I don’t have children, and I’m in college, and I want to be different from the rest of my family. [...] I even think that if I get married I don’t want to marry a person from Latin America, because I want to be something different from the rest of my family.

Ellen sees the pattern as so culturally embedded that in her determination to break free of it, she believes it best to marry outside her culture. Carmen also expressed a strong desire to break with cultural expectations for women:

I didn’t want to be stuck like everyone else in the community. So it made me more driven to learn and get away from there. You know, like girls out of high

school, just straight into marriage or straight into motherhood, and not really anything in between. I did not want that, I was like, that's not for me, I need to move away from that. I mean, I love this area and I love the community and whatever, but I'm not gonna be here my whole life, I'm gonna get out of there.

Both Carmen and Ellen reveal a conviction that the choice to pursue an education offers an alternative to the "straight into marriage/motherhood" pattern, and their preference is unequivocal.

Ironically, while distinguishing themselves from others in their community by delineating choices which would allow them to break free of culturally-embedded patterns and expectations, participants also held themselves up as placing greater value on their cultural heritage than their peers did. Carmen's assurance "I love this area and I love the community" was echoed in a later thread in which she distinguished herself from those who do not so highly value their backgrounds: "I have maybe two friends that speak Spanish. Nobody really bothered, you know, instilling that in them, so they never bothered themselves." Xochitl made essentially the same point:

With people my age I see it all the time, they think, I don't know, I don't think they have a culture, you know, even though their parents try to teach them or show them. Like, no, they reject it. So I think it's a good thing, it makes me different.

Choices affecting the quality of the home environment were also subject to comparison and contrast. Asked to explain what he felt most supported his academic efforts, Francisco described his home life as opposed to that of others in his community:

The four of us we're very close. My parents have always been good parents, and my sister and I good kids. We've never, you know, roamed the streets all day because our parents were at work. When we first got here both my parents worked, so my sister and I would stay at home with my cousins. But my parents realized that it was better for my mom to stay at home and raise us, since we were new to the country and young, where if she probably would have kept working

I'm not saying it's a certain thing, but I think I would've been hanging out with kids at school, like bad influences, or kind of just going out on the street and doing whatever I wanted because my parents worked. I feel like even kids who aren't immigrants, just kids in general, especially Hispanics, whose parents don't make a lot of money, or who work so much that there's no one at home to cook for them, to take care of them, to keep an eye on them, they just grow up doing whatever they want. I think that is the difference, the environment at home.

Francisco spoke of material sacrifices that his family had had to make because of their decision to depend upon a single breadwinner, but concluded that this was in the end result a wise move, in contrast to the choices made by the other families he describes, in which unsupervised children fell prey to "bad influences." Francisco employs here the expression "just going out on the street and doing whatever" as shorthand to refer to the urban problems of gangs, drugs, and violence. Several participants voiced similarly worded concerns about the menace of gangs and criminal activity in their communities.

Like Francisco, Daniel contrasted his family life with that of others in his community:

A lot of people say when they come here the family just breaks, because they don't talk about the problems that they're having. [...] In my case, my dad was having trouble at work, but he knew I was having trouble too, cause I was just learning another language, I was learning a new culture. So it wasn't just like "Oh, you're in Mexico, you can do all the things you're used to doing." So we comprehend each other. And that's something that I don't see the families usually do. And from my point of view, that's just an excuse to say "Oh, we came here and my family just break apart." I think that's just an excuse. I see some of the parents, they will focus on the beer, they will focus on the TV, to take out the pressure.

Throughout the interviews, participants describe not only the sense of being different but also, significantly, the sense that this difference was to a large degree a matter of individual choices. The data indicate that identity among academically successful mid-childhood Latino immigrants often implies a belief in the value of

individual choice and an abiding sense of uniqueness and difference from co-ethnics.

Discussion: Resolution of Mid-Childhood Immigrant Identity

Based on the interviews, it does not seem that these participants invest a great amount of energy agonizing over questions related to their identity. Recall that while expressing sympathy for the plight of their fellow mid-childhood immigrant Eva Hoffman – and in spite of their admission that they felt socially isolated – few professed to share the sense of internalized alienation Hoffman suggested in describing her sister and herself as feeling like “strangers to ourselves” in the new setting.

This relative sanguinity on the part of the participants is perhaps not surprising – few people have the time and desire to engage such abstractions, and this is especially true of busy young adults juggling school, work, and family obligations. However, the stories they tell – the positions they take, the attitudes they express about others and about the worlds they inhabit – all taken together reveal much about who and what they conceive themselves to be. The narrative data produced by participants in this study revealed complex, layered, and often inconsistent and even contradictory perspectives on identity. The data also suggested that for these individuals, identity development is an ongoing and contested process which is also, perhaps surprisingly, not a source of particular consternation.

The limited experience of racism and discrimination reported by participants – possibly related to their residence in an enclave community – likely contributed to their ability to incorporate disparate cultural influences with minimal internal conflict. Being discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity or race has been seen to affect immigrants’

attitudes toward the larger society and hence their acculturation and adaptation. In a large international study of immigrant adaptation, Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) found that “when individuals experience discrimination, they are likely to reject close involvement with the national society and be more oriented to their own group [...]. However, when not discriminated against, they approach the national society with the same degree of respect that has been accorded to them” (p. 326). Thus it is not surprising to observe a general lack of acutely perceived internalized cultural conflict in the cases studied here.

Degree of identity conflict has also been correlated with socioeconomic status. Syed, Azmitia and Phinney (2007) found that immigrants with higher SES demonstrated less interest in expressing ethnic identification than their less materially fortunate peers. However, aside from the observation that the participants in the present study probably enjoyed a more favorable SES than many of their peers in the community both prior to and after migrating, it is impossible to extend any warrant on this theme, since SES was not explicitly quantified and no comparison group was examined.

Nonetheless, the apparent lack of urgency on the issue of identity among the majority of participants was notable. Regardless of the reasons for it, the literature suggests that this is a good thing: “An achieved ethnic identity, involving a secure sense of one’s ethnicity and resolution of conflicts about one’s group, is assumed to include positive feelings about one’s group and to be a source of personal strength and positive self-evaluation” (Phinney, et al., 2001, p. 502).

Further discussion of this issue and of emerging models for considering mid-

childhood immigrant identity are presented in Chapter Nine. First, however, attention is turned to a subcategory of the participant sample who share a characteristic which exerts tremendous power over nearly every aspect of their lives, including identity: undocumented immigrant status.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“WE’RE INVISIBLE”: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

One of the most surprising features of the sample of participants who provided their stories for this inquiry was the proportion of them who reported being undocumented immigrants. The criteria listed in the participant recruitment announcement (Appendix B) made no mention of immigration status, and the interview protocol (Appendix D) contained no reference to this topic. At no point in the interviews were participants expressly asked to speak about their status. Nonetheless, out of 15 participants, six made it clear that they were at that time unauthorized immigrants, one indicated that her status had recently become legal after many years as an unauthorized immigrant, two others strongly suggested that they lacked documentation but chose not to speak further on this topic, and in another the participant’s status was ambiguous.

Given that this was not an intentional part of the original study design, and given that speaking about undocumented status could imply an increased risk for participants, in no case did I introduce this issue in the interviews, choosing to respect the participants’ wishes as to whether and how much to talk about the theme. Only when they made their status explicit (e.g., “I don’t have a social”), thereby indicating that this was a subject they were willing to discuss, did I follow up. In several cases, the participants who described themselves as undocumented spoke forcefully and in detail on the topic, while as mentioned above, two made clear by way of vague or noncommittal responses that this

was not a topic they were comfortable discussing in specifics.

What is *not* surprising, in retrospect, is that undocumented students would feel the need to speak about this status when asked to describe their academic endeavors: For those in this situation, the fact of their immigration status is unavoidable and greatly affects – albeit often in shadows – virtually every part of their lives.

Characteristics of the U.S. Undocumented Immigrant Population

A recent report on unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. commissioned by the Pew Hispanic Center (Passel & Cohn, 2009) draws on 2008 census data to provide a comprehensive portrait of this population, which is estimated to be 11.9 million, equivalent to roughly 4% of the nation's population. This group is predominantly Hispanic (76%) and among Hispanics the largest segment come from Mexico (59%); nearly all (94%) live in metropolitan areas. Though the population of unauthorized immigrants grew dramatically between 1990 and 2006, it has been holding steady since then. Passel and Cohn report that the children of undocumented immigrants comprise 6.8% of all students in U.S. elementary and secondary schools, and an estimated 1.5 million elementary and secondary students are undocumented. The households of undocumented immigrants are more likely to consist of a two-parent family with children (47%) than the households of either native-born residents (21%) or legally documented immigrants (35). Undocumented children are likely to have documented siblings, as 73% of all children in such households are U.S.-born.

Passel and Cohn (2009) also report a large disparity in educational attainment and income levels for undocumented immigrants compared with non-immigrants.

Undocumented adults ages 25 to 47 have a markedly lower education level than the native-born, with 47% reporting less than a high school education as compared to 8% among U.S.-born adults. Among young adults ages 18 to 24, of undocumented immigrants who complete high school, 49% go on to enroll in college, compared to 71% of native-born. Household income among undocumented immigrants in 2007 was 28% lower than that of non-immigrants, and the poverty rate in the former group was nearly double that of the latter.

As a subcategory of undocumented immigrants, and despite their substantial numbers and the particular challenges they face, undocumented students have been the focus of very little formal inquiry. The authors of a recent major study of academic resilience among this population offered the blunt observation: “There is a lack of research on the undocumented immigrant student population” (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009, p. 3). Surveying study 104 undocumented high school and college students, Perez et al. found that those individuals who were able to succeed academically in spite of the risk factors associated with this status were more likely to report “high levels of personal and environmental protective factors (e.g., supportive parents, friends, and participation in school activities)” (p. 1) than those who were less successful in school.

The handful of other inquiries focused specifically on undocumented students have, like the present one, used qualitative methods and involved fairly small samples. Findings indicate primarily that much of what is true of immigrants is also true of undocumented immigrants, e.g., that they can feel isolated and fearful (De Leon, 2005;

Dozier, 1993), that in general they have a sense of optimism (De Leon, 2005), that they must manage dual cultural influences (Munoz, 2008), that they face economic challenges (Oliverrez, 2006). Certain characteristics have been found to be particular or particularly acute in undocumented students as opposed to other immigrants, such as the inability to access financial assistance for college (Oliverrez, 2006), depression (Dozier, 1993), and feelings of disillusion and the tendency to significantly reduce efforts in school and curtail academic aspirations on discovering their status (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales et al., 2003).

In at least one sense the unintentionally mixed composition of the population sample in the present study was serendipitous, in that including both documented and undocumented students allows some comparison between the two groups. What was found in this cohort is that no significant difference obtained between the documented and undocumented in many areas – e.g., the role of family support, the role of mentoring, the experience of discrimination, feelings of being deceived by parents about migration plans, the overall sense of newcomer optimism, parental education levels, the limited use of academic services, experience with language learning, the significance of extracurricular involvement in acculturation – as explored in the preceding findings chapters. The present chapter, then, is focused on what seem on the basis of this study sample to be unique features of the experience of mid-childhood immigrants who are undocumented.

Implications of Undocumented Status for College Students

Perez, et al. (2009) provide a sobering overview of the implications of being

undocumented as a student:

Not only do these students endure the same stressors and risk factors as other Latino and immigrant youth, they also face constant institutional and societal exclusion and rejection due to their undocumented status. They are not eligible for most scholarships, do not qualify for any form of government sponsored financial assistance, are not eligible to apply for a driver's license, are legally barred from formal employment, and may be deported at any time. (p. 2)

A striking characteristic of many undocumented young people, including several in this study, is that they are unaware of their status throughout childhood, only coming to truly understand this situation and what it implies for them during the later years of high school, when they begin to consider their options for college. An exception to this tendency can be seen in the case of those who entered the U.S. illegally, an experience which typically leaves a strong impression, as was the case for two participants. But such individuals are at least spared the trauma of later discovery of their status: Those who brave clandestine crossings are acutely aware from the start that their presence is unsanctioned. As one recalled of the experience: "I didn't feel good, because I knew we weren't doing the right thing."

In the cases of the majority of the undocumented participants in this study, however, their families found ways to enter the country without resorting to *coyotes* and perilous desert crossings. Most commonly, they obtained permission to come as visitors and then "overstayed" their visas and remained in the country. In one case, it seemed that the participant maintained visitor status for several years (by repeatedly traveling to Mexico) before finally staying in the U.S. (Individuals who overstay their visa terms are sometimes referred to as being "out of status" rather than undocumented, though the latter term is commonly used as an omnibus designator for those who lack legal

immigrant status regardless of the reason. Very recently, some commentators [e.g., Passel & Cohn, 2009] have expressed a preference for the term “unauthorized immigrant,” though I find this term to be problematic as well, since some immigrants who lack documentation are subsequently found to be lawfully present.)

It seems safe to assume that as seen in this study sample, undocumented immigrants who succeed in college are more likely to have initially entered the country with proper documentation and via non-hazardous methods, since obtaining visitor visas is generally restricted to more economically advantaged families, who as such are also able to provide their children more opportunities than are the needy.

Disillusion and College Planning

I remember when I graduated, I was crying so bad because I knew I’m not gonna make it to college, we don’t have money. I don’t have money. I don’t know what to do. I was crying because I really wanted to study. My mom was like, “Don’t worry about it, we’re gonna figure out something.” (Veronica)

As tales from high school graduation go, Veronica’s is not among the more cheerful. Yet for undocumented students, this account seems to reflect a rather common experience. Through most of their schooling, students of this status are somewhat sheltered from the unpleasant reality of their condition, at least in regard to how this affects their educational opportunities; public schools are legally enjoined from treating unauthorized immigrants differently from any other. Often the point at which these students become truly conscious of the limitations their status imposes is when they begin considering their options for post-secondary studies. The effects of this dawning realization can be powerfully negative. In an ethnographic study of undocumented immigrant students, Abrego (2006) found that they became disillusioned upon learning of

their status and revised their academic expectations downward. Gonzales, et al. (2003) presented student *testimonios* which depicted how even students who had previously excelled in school turned their backs on their studies upon finding that they were undocumented.

Daniel was among several participants who described precisely this experience:

My senior year, when I was trying to apply for the scholarships, like, uh, when I saw the whole packet for scholarships from the high school, they were offering, they all require a social security number. And I said, well, I'm not legal in the country, and I'm doing good, but I still, I can't get anything. And I was like, at that moment, I felt like, well, where do I belong? Where am I? What's my category? What's the point of me having good grades if I'm gonna go nowhere?

Xochitl's account of her college planning closely echoed Daniel's. Although she had excelled at an elite college-preparatory magnet high school, she discovered that her status made it unlikely that she would be able to follow her classmates to well regarded universities:

I always wanted to go to college [...] but when I was in high school, that's when it really kind of got to me.... What am I gonna do? And my parents and I would talk about it, and we started to realize that school was expensive, just applying and going there. It's like, "How're we gonna do it, for you to go there?" [...] Even my advisor was like, "You know, I don't want to discourage you, but considering your situation, I don't know if they're gonna be able to accept you." And I'm just like, "I don't see why my status should be a concern. I mean, I guess my grades speak for myself. You know, I have a good record."

Her incredulity is to some degree revealing of the level of her investment in the culture of her adopted homeland: She cannot understand how this place that she feels so much a part of could deal with her so unjustly. As presented later in this chapter, Xochitl expressed a similar (and similarly naïve, one might suggest) sentiment regarding the possibility that her family might suffer from legal sanctions if their status were

discovered. Like her good grades, she asserted, their impeccable record as taxpayers and participants in U.S. society should speak for itself.

Marta also excelled as a student at first, only to become disillusioned. At first this was mainly due to her parents' indecision regarding whether they intended to stay in the U.S., but as that fear waned, it was replaced with the discouraging recognition of the effects of her legal status. She began to ignore her studies: "When it came to my ACTs, that's another thing that I didn't do very well on. Because I, my mind was set on not going to college, because I thought I was not going to make it." Through the intervention of a caring mentor in high school, she was able to overcome her disillusion and later became involved in school. By the time of the interview for this study, Marta had been able to regularize her immigration status, and she had turned her concern to a younger sister who was still dealing with the effects of her unauthorized status:

She's like "I'm not gonna be able to go to school." 'Cause she doesn't have a visa yet. So she's like "Why pass all these classes, why go through high school if I'm not gonna be able to make it through college?"

Participants spoke of their painful awareness of the hurdles that their status placed before them, often expressing regret for what might have been, if only for this undesired condition. Regarding her inability to pay for college, Veronica lamented:

So you see me right now, and it's like any other college kid, the only thing is it's coming out of my pocket. What wouldn't I have gave to go to [university X] and to study over there? [...] What wouldn't I have gave if I was able to take a scholarship and go to [university Y]?

Francisco took this line of thinking even further, expressing regret over the circumstances of his own birth. Aware, as most immigrants are, that the act of being born on U.S. soil confers eligibility for citizenship, he recalled: "Sometimes I tell my mom, 'If

you had just crossed the border and had me here, and then gone back, things would be completely different.””

Undocumented Status and College Finances

The sense of regret over what could have been extends to the economics of funding higher education as well. Francisco revealed his sharp awareness of what was out of his reach due only to his legal status:

All through high school I had good grades, my ACT score was pretty good. And I wanted to go out of state to school. But since my status here isn't... what it should be, I can't get financial aid. I mean I did get a scholarship because of my academics, but it wouldn't pay my whole tuition. [...] My parents don't make enough money to even do anything. They barely make enough to put food on the table, pay rent, bills, whatever. So I pay my own tuition myself. And I can't really get a good job. So I have to budget, pay my tuition every month, at the beginning of the semester pay my books.

Francisco summed up the effects of his status: “It keeps me away from... I would qualify for, because my parents have a low income, I would qualify to get pretty much my whole school paid for, at a good school, out of state.”

Nearly all of the participants cited in the subsections titled “Attitudes Toward Community College” and “Financing College” in Chapter Six as feeling that they had to attend a community college due to their inability to pay university tuition are those who are being discussed in the present chapter. It could be argued that those earlier sections might be more logically placed in this chapter, except that financing college can present challenges to any student, not only the undocumented.

Even so, the funding issue seems to loom larger for undocumented students, and to involve the additional issue of fairness: Their ongoing financial struggles highlight the limits that their status represents and reveal the painful differences between them and

their legally-resident peers. Nearly every one of the undocumented participants described their situations using some variation of Veronica's phrase "it's coming out of my pocket." Like Francisco, Xochitl, and others, Veronica learned by way of observing the experiences of friends and classmates without legal barriers that her academic performance in high school, combined with her family's economic level, would have warranted not only university admission but also financial aid. Perhaps demonstrating a conviction similar to Xochitl's "I don't see why my status should be a concern," Veronica decided to test her "newcomer optimism," her faith that things would somehow work out. Acting "like any other college kid," she described how she and a friend went off to enroll in a university in a city an hour's distance from home:

I was actually getting my dorm ready and everything, but once we saw all the bills coming in at once, it was too much. [...] I knew I was gonna be able to pay probably only one semester, and I had to back up, completely, because it was too much money.

Despite the brave face she puts on her experience, one can imagine the effect on a young woman, setting off at the outset of her university years, of having to abandon the adventure midstream. She continued:

The thing that has messed us up a lot and, it's a lot stronger than people think, is the fact that there's no money. So me being, doing payments by myself every month with the little pay I get, from restaurants and stuff like that, and I have to pick it up by myself, it's a struggle. I mean it hurts that you can't even get money for you to spend.

Veronica briefly adopts a kind of collective voice, speaking on behalf of undocumented students about how having no funding "has messed us up a lot." She also mentions what is a commonality for undocumented students: Not only are they barred from receiving most financial assistance, they cannot work legally, and are typically relegated to low-

paid and irregular employment, in “restaurants and stuff like that.” As Francisco observed: “I can’t really get a good job.”

Some undocumented students are able to access funding for school which is not tied to federal or other restrictions. However, given the risk attached to revealing their status, many are reluctant to openly seek such funds. For related reasons, institutions tend not to advertize the availability of funds for unauthorized immigrants. Marta explained: “I wasn’t well informed, you know, that there’s possibilities for people that don’t have, um, visas, to go to colleges, and you know work on something in the meantime, before you get, before you’re legal. I didn’t know.”

Roxana raised this issue as well, reporting that although she had obtained some funding, this was an uncertain source:

It’s hard because, the money, you know, you can’t get financial aid, and stuff like that. [...] Last semester there was a booklet with a lot of scholarships. I think only one scholarship was available for people that were not residents here, and I did qualify for that one, but then I was trying to apply again and they told me that you can’t, everything changed. And I’m like, Oh, wow. That’s why I’m trying to find out, is there any way I can get a scholarship again? Everything seems to be changing since last year.

The “booklet with a lot of scholarships” Roxana refers to is an example of the conundrum institutions face in attempting to deal equitably with undocumented students. Several years previous, this booklet included several scholarships which did not stipulate legal immigration status as a criterion for eligibility. Gradually, however, as funders became aware of the possibility that their scholarships might be used by undocumented immigrants – possibly as a result of the institution publishing this information – the number of scholarships which did not require applicants to provide proof of legal status

diminished.

The result of the financial hardships imposed by undocumented status is often abandonment of studies. For the participants in this study, this is an outcome they had so far avoided. Xochitl, however, described a friend who gave up:

He used to come here last semester, we would talk about, “How you gonna pay for your college?” You know, ‘cause he’s like, “Are you gonna transfer?” And I’m like, “Yeah, you know I’m gonna try and transfer next year.” And he’s like, “How are you gonna pay for college? It’s so expensive, and they don’t even help us.” So he dropped out of college. So I don’t think everyone has actually that will to keep fighting or to keep going, because people get discouraged too.

Overall, educational finances were cited as an ongoing challenge by all of the undocumented participants, and in most cases they deemed this the single most difficult issue they faced. Additionally, they perceived their exclusion from the economic assistance programs available to their classmates and peers as burdensome and unfair.

Isolation, Separation, Injustice

The children of immigrants come to craft their identities in part as a function of how they are viewed and received by the dominant culture [...]. How does the child incorporate the notion that she is an alien, or an illegal – that she is unwanted and does not warrant the most basic rights of education and health care? (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 7)

The question posed here by the Suárez-Orozcos is of course rhetorical; the answers are obvious enough, and have been consistently confirmed by studies which found that undocumented immigrant students reported feelings of isolation, fearfulness, displacement, disillusion, and societal rejection (De Leon, 2005; Dozier, 1993; Gonzales, et al., 2003; Perez, et al. 2009).

Participants in the present study expressed their concerns in more straightforward language. Veronica, speaking again in the collective voice, stated: “We’re not located in

this country, we're just here, pretty much. We're invisible to anybody."

It was Xochitl's story, however, which most fully illustrated how maintaining the secret of undocumented status could affect an individual's interpersonal relationships and self-image:

Most of my friends went to universities right after high school. And it just kind of got to me. I'm like, "Well, I'm going to a community college," and they're like, "But why? But why?" You know, I don't qualify for financial aid. And they wouldn't understand that. So I'm just like, OK, just keep it to myself, you know. [...] Most of my friends, they're at [university X, university Y] or, yeah, four-year institutions. I'm pretty much one of the only ones that actually had to come to a community college.

Significantly, Xochitl disclosed that even her closest friend from high school was unaware of her status:

She's like, "I still don't understand why you went to a community college." And I'm just like, I feel like I can tell her, at the same time, like, well maybe it's something I wanna keep to myself, you know, I think it's something very personal. And like I don't think she would, even though she's my best friend, she wouldn't judge me, or she wouldn't like, she would just say, "Oh wow, I didn't know that." But, I'm like, "Well, I wasn't ready to go to a four-year school."

This reveals a seemingly inevitable outcome: Undocumented students find themselves in the position of having not only to conceal the truth of their status, but also to fabricate reasons for the effects of it, sometimes even to their closest friends. Xochitl explained:

She's my best friend. It's just.... She thinks I'm a citizen. Or a resident here. She truly believes that. [...] I never say yes, I never say no. Because... I know I can trust her, it's not trusting issues, it's just, it's complicated to explain it to a person sometimes, you know. They're like, they don't really understand. For example here in school, you know, this girl, I talk to her, but just the way.... Like someone tried to explain to her why they weren't residents or citizens, and she just started like saying all this stuff, and I'm like, "It's not how you think it is. It's not that easy."

It is not a question of trust, Xochitl asserts, but of understanding: She believes her friend

is simply not capable of understanding the “complicated” issue of her status. And so she feels it necessary to conceal from her “best friend” a fact of her life which profoundly affects her opportunities, her decisions, and her self-image. And, clearly, her social relationships: Her status isolates her, an immovable wall between her and her best friend.

Not surprisingly, participants who were undocumented expressed a perception that they were the victims of injustice, of inequitable and unfair treatment. Though aware that their presence in the U.S. was not legally sanctioned, they were also aware that they did not act to place themselves in this circumstance. As Francisco explained: “Myself and my sister, we didn’t really have a say in whether we wanted to stay here or not, and I mean we’re really not at fault for the decision that my parents made.” Roxana expressed a similar conviction, then expanded on it to encompass her current situation: “When I was little I didn’t have a choice, but now I think my decision has to count. Because I’m already, I have to go to school, I have to look for my future.” She recognizes that she was not responsible for her legal status, but now sees an obligation to herself to make the best of the situation she was given.

Veronica was well aware of the imbalance in the benefits available to legal residents and to her. In what might be seen as a case of sour grapes, she expressed disapproval of the attitude of entitlement she perceived these benefits to engender:

Sometimes I get frustrated because, I think, there’s other kids here that have the opportunity to go to college, to be someone, and they’re like, “Nah, that’s it. We’ll have the United States of America just take care of us, because we could

just ask for social security, we could ask for Link¹⁸ card, we could ask for anything.”

In addition to her frustration and scorn, Veronica reveals here her awareness that having access to benefits can also lead to complacency. She followed this with her view of undocumented immigrants like herself:

The people that are trying to get it, the people that have come up from some ground that is not even.... it's not even, you don't even know how they're living. And you're like, "OK, wow, and they're doing all of this!" And it's so much struggle.

Deriving the inspiration to succeed from the struggle of migration – the significance of the “struggle narrative” – was a prevalent theme in the interview data, as discussed in Chapter Seven. In this case, Veronica makes this same connection while focusing more narrowly on the struggle inherent in undocumented immigrant status: “You don't even know how they're living. And you're like, 'OK, wow, and they're doing all of this!'"

In a similar manner, Daniel framed his perception of the complacency of others despite the opportunities which are open to them:

When I see students that are not doing a good job, and they have a social security, where they can take advantage of the opportunities that are offered, they're just screwing up in school. It just kind of frustrates me, it's like, "How's it possible that you have just that number that could get you through another life, and not take advantage of that?" Then I kind of say, "Well, just cause I don't have that, it's not gonna stop me. I'm gonna find my way through and be someone."

Like Veronica, Daniel finds a kind of inspiration in reflecting upon what he is able to achieve in spite of the obstacles he faces.

Also inherent in the comments from Veronica and Daniel is the acute sense of

¹⁸ Link is a “food stamp” style welfare assistance program.

injustice. Roxana expressed this in describing how she became more aware of the benefits available to others and the limitations that her status placed on her:

It got to a point when I got really depressed. I'm like, "Why can't I have the benefits a lot of people have? Why do a lot people that have the social, they could go to school, they could have financial aid, they don't even go to school, they're like in the street? What are they thinking?" And I don't have anything, and I'm here. And I wish I could have my social and I wish I could have a lot of benefits, and scholarships, and I could get financial aid. I think it would be easier, way easier for me to have something. But I'm like, if I want to have a better future, I have to find the ways to stay here. It's really, really, really hard, especially when you don't have those benefits.

The emphasis Roxana places on the challenge she has faced and is facing – "It's really, really, really hard" – is unequivocal and poignant. Ultimately, however, like Daniel and Veronica, she understands that her success represents a kind of refutation of the complacency of others: "If I want to have a better future, I have to find the ways."

"I'm Just Tired": Struggling against Depression and Hopelessness

Depression, sadness, and feelings of hopelessness related to or caused by their status has been identified as common among undocumented immigrants (Dozier, 1993). The sources of such emotions would seem clear on reviewing the preceding sections: disillusion, isolation, separation, financial difficulties, fear, unfairness.

Among the participants in this study, evidence of acute sadness and hopelessness was abundant. Roxana returned to these themes repeatedly: "It really got depressing. [...] It was really really really sad sometimes. [...] It got to a point when I got really depressed." She offered a vivid illustration:

Sometimes I get home and I'm all sad, and almost crying, and I'm like, "Dad, I'm just tired already." I mean, I'm trying so hard to keep going to school, but it's so hard. And he would be, "I know, it's OK, just calm down."

Daniel described how during the most difficult times, he tried to counteract his feelings by throwing himself into school activities:

And I went in a moment of frustration and depression, that moment was from November, last year November, when I was a senior, and then all the way to January. I think my only way to take the depression off was being a wrestler. I was a wrestler my senior year. In that moment it was sports, that's what helped me. But that depression, I was like, "What am I working for?" And part of my character says, "Well, you've been a good student the whole year, so just finish good." I mean, you don't know where you're going, 'cause that was the moment when I was lost, I was like, where do I belong?

Daniel's "I was lost" evinced a notion which arose in several interviews: Participants described themselves at various points as feeling "lost." This was attributed to issues related to general newcomer adaptation, but also – as in Daniel's case – to circumstances connected with undocumented status. Additionally, involvement in sports and other extracurricular activities was commonly cited by among participants, including those who were undocumented, as greatly aiding their efforts to combat feelings of alienation and help them to connect with their new surroundings. Several of the undocumented participants cited their involvement in the college bridge program (as described in Chapter Six), and in particular in activities such as attending conferences and working in student leadership, as instrumental in allaying their feelings of hopelessness. Sara said of this program: "It has helped me.... It gave me hope." She later returned to the theme of hope, describing her efforts to focus on her objectives: "It's really hard for me to stay positive, to stay on track, to keep going. But I don't lose hope." Speaking of her own hopes that immigration laws will eventually be changed to allow undocumented students to regularize their status, Xochitl said simply: "I have faith."

Finding a Way Forward: Undocumented Student Resilience

As evidenced in the final words of the preceding section, and in spite of the rather bleak picture depicted throughout this chapter, the undocumented students in this study – like their peers of the other status – steadfastly returned to a tone of optimism. After describing foreboding banks of storm clouds, participants invariably came to find silver linings. After describing the hardships her status had imposed, Veronica analyzed the situation further:

But at the same time I'm like, you know what? All this struggling, I see it now, I do something, and I know how to appreciate it more than anybody else, you know? I know if I'd buy a phone, I would appreciate it!

Revealing that her economic situation prevents her from possessing what most students (and others, young and old) these days consider a birthright – a cellular phone – Veronica puts as positive a spin on it: unlike those who take their phones for granted, “I would appreciate it!”

Participants consistently expressed their determination to persevere in the face of whatever obstacles. Regarding his status, Daniel stated: “I kind of say, ‘Well, just cause I don’t have that, it’s not gonna stop me. I’m gonna find my way through and be someone.’”

Sara espoused a similar spirit of resolve to move forward against the odds: “I don’t know about university, how I’m gonna get the money for that. But I’m just gonna study, I’m not gonna stop. [...] But I don’t lose hope. This is the country of opportunity, so I’m looking for that.” Though she claims elsewhere to view herself as “100% Mexican,” Sara has clearly embraced the notion commonly referred to as American

exceptionalism.

This notion of the U.S. as a special place – “the country of opportunity” – often seems to be felt more acutely by immigrants than the native-born. Roxana revealed a rather typical conviction of the same: “If I want to have a better future, I have to find the ways to stay here.” Elsewhere, she described an almost mystical sense of her destiny in this country:

If I’m here, it’s because, I’m here because of something. And if I really wanted, if this mission, let’s say, it was to be over there, I wouldn’t have been here. I would’ve been over there since a long time ago. And maybe I’m here because of some, because I belong here. I’m supposed to be here.

While not attributing his presence in this country to predestination, Francisco expressed nonetheless his recognition of its inalterable effects upon his identity. Even in spite of being considered “illegal” by the U.S. government, he said:

I’m living better off than I think I would be, over there. And even though it is hard and frustrating most of the time, I still feel like I’m American now because I’ve lived here longer, and everything that I’ve experienced, and just myself growing into an adult has been taking place here.

Francisco’s is an example of the persistent newcomer optimism observed in the interviews. Despite the obstacles his status presents, he believes that he is on the whole “better off” living here. Veronica was adamant in her desire not only to make progress, but also to do so of her own accord:

I’m serious about, you know, becoming someone better. You know, I’m not here to destroy anybody’s world or to do anybody any harm, I just wanna have something I never never had. But I wanna work for it, I don’t want nobody to give me anything.

Unauthorized Status and Cultural Affiliation

Common sense as well as empirical research suggests that the length of time that

an individual resides in a new cultural setting plays a determining role in how fully they internalize the values of that culture (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Common sense (as well as personal experience and observation) would also suggest that the amount of contact with the old culture would also influence the feelings of being connected to it. This has implications for undocumented immigrants since one common characteristic of this group is that due to the difficulty and risk involved in cross-border travel, they typically have very limited contact with their country of birth.

Some of the undocumented participants in this study, particularly those with lengthy residence in the U.S., displayed strongly assimilative characteristics, expressing their feelings of affinity for and membership in the host culture, often coupled with rather critical views on their cultures of origin.¹⁹ This amounts to a phenomenon which might be called an “affiliation paradox,” wherein the individual’s long-term separation from the country of origin weakens their connection with it, while at the same time their lack of legal status in the country of residence works against full attachment. They find themselves in a kind of “man without a country” situation, except that in a cruel twist, these are not “men” without countries, they are (or were) children without countries.

A striking example of this was Xochitl, who described her Latino peers as tending toward separatism and bias against Whites, tendencies she viewed with disapproval. She was forthright regarding her own affiliation: “Most of my friends are Caucasian, American, but that’s because I feel like, I can identify myself more with them, you

¹⁹ In “Individuation and Choice: Distinguishing Self from ‘Other’ Immigrants” in Chapter Seven, several of those participants who are critical of their co-ethnics’ less adaptive behaviors are among those featured in the present chapter.

know.” But nothing revealed Xochitl’s internalization of U.S. culture more than her unabashed espousal of exactly the kind of rugged individualism for which this country is best known. When asked to say who she believed most influenced her academic success, she responded: “I guess it’s just myself.”

On the other hand, like most participants – and especially those whose statements, bearing, and attitudes suggested high levels of acculturation – Xochitl also professed her affiliation with her country of origin when specifically asked to characterize her identity. Among all immigrants (and even the children of immigrants, as many of my Polish and Irish relatives illustrate) a common tendency is to embrace the old culture as a reaction to the sense that it is being lost, a mild variety of an affliction which has been termed “cultural bereavement” (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Eisenbruch, 1990). For undocumented immigrants, this reaction may be heightened by what is perceived as movement toward a new culture which does not recognize their rights.

Another participant who showed strong affiliation tendencies was Francisco:

I would say that since I’ve live here now longer than I did there, that I’m just used to my life here, that I don’t really look back into how I was, or how I lived before I came over. I would say I’m more American now than Mexican.

And yet, Francisco hastened to add: “I mean, I’m still proud of being Mexican.” When asked if his legal status played a role in this, he replied:

I don’t seclude myself and feel like I’m an outcast because of my status. I mean all of my friends are, well most of them, I do have a couple who are the same as myself, but we’re American, I guess, I mean we do everything American kids do. I mean, except FAFSA and all that but, no I don’t seclude myself.

The qualifier “except FAFSA and all that” is of course shorthand for a whole slate of limitations and prohibitions to which Francisco and his peers are subject as a result of

their status; nonetheless, he asserts, they cannot deny a culture that they have internalized: “We’re American.”

Veronica described her family’s adoption of U.S. customs:

Everything has changed. I know we’re way way way more Americanized, I see it on my parents, I see it on, on everybody, I see it also in the fact that for Christmas it’s not no more *Dia de Reyes*, it’s Christmas. We’re not gonna celebrate *Dia de Reyes*. We’re in the United States, we have to adapt. They’re not supposed to be adapting to us, we’re adapting to the new country. And that’s where I love my mom cause she always told us, you guys gotta stop doing things, you guys gotta do the new things, because we’re coming to a country where we have new opportunities, but we gotta know how to take them.

Veronica expresses admiration for her mother’s insistence that they embrace the new culture, and like other participants she expresses (implicitly here, explicitly elsewhere) her disapproval of those of her co-ethnics who actively resist acculturation.

Roxana presented perhaps the closest thing to an exception to the affiliation paradox. She expressed a considerable degree of internalization of new-culture values: “I’ve been spending most of my life here. I mean I’m getting used to here, everything how it works here.” She also described the culturally distancing effect of not being able to return to her country for ten years:

I really, I don’t know what’s going on over there, I don’t know how people act. I don’t think I would fit right, there. It would be a little hard because you have a really different point of view of things around. Maybe I do value a lot of things that they don’t, or I see a lot of things are different. So I think it’s really different. So I don’t know if I would be able to fit in the little circle.

On the other hand, Roxana described her identity in terms that made clear that her first sympathies remained grounded in her home culture:

I don’t consider myself from here. Even though I’ve been living more years, well, half of my life here, but I just consider myself a Mexican cause that’s how, I guess, because of my parents, the people I hang out with.

Asked a follow-up question similar to that posed to Francisco, i.e., if she felt that her attitude on this question would be different if she were suddenly granted residency papers, she replied:

I think I would be the same person. I don't think I would change my attitude or how I feel or anything. I would be more thankful than anything to have them, but I don't think they would change me in any way.

As Roxana's case illustrates, the so-called affiliation paradox, the phenomenon in which undocumented immigrants exhibit strong affiliation with the host country coupled with weakening ties to the old seemingly for reasons related to their legal status, is by no means universally apparent in the study sample. However, in some cases this dynamic is strongly apparent, and in the context of what is known about the effects on acculturation of length of residence and contact with the home culture, this seems a reasonable hypothesis: Because they cannot revisit their country of origin, undocumented immigrants are more likely than their documented peers to gradually lose their feelings of connection to the place and to replace them with stronger ties to the country of residence despite their legal "invisibility" here.

Incentive Value of Undocumented Status

Throughout the interviews, undocumented participants characterized their status as an obstacle which they were determined to overcome. Daniel stated this simply: "Well, just 'cause I don't have that [a social security number], it's not gonna stop me. I'm gonna find my way through and be someone."

After hearing similar claims in early interviews, I added a follow-up question on this topic for those who demonstrated a willingness to discuss their status. Asked if she

felt that this played a role in motivating her, Veronica replied:

It motivates the hell out of me. Because we didn't have anything to eat in Mexico, we didn't have money, and I just wanted to show, and it's also from stuff that my dad has told me and people that have pushed me down, and I'm like, you know what, let's do it. Let's prove them wrong and let's prove that I can do it.

When asked if she felt her undocumented status was motivational, Xochitl's reply was with similarly unequivocal:

Yes. That too, definitely. A lot, a lot. Because you know, even when I started here, they tell me, "Well you know, how are you gonna afford college?" It's always like, "How are you gonna do it?" You know there's always something that stops you, always that stops you, and I think that has definitely made me work harder, even though I do have to work harder, but at the end it kind of feels good, it's like, OK, I'm being recognized for what I'm doing, and the hard work is paying off. So it does make me work harder, my status and everything. Yeah, I think it does help you just kind of keep.... You're like going against something, you know?

At the end of her interview, Xochitl was asked if there was anything else that she felt had not been covered, or anything she wished to expand on. She returned to the status-incentive theme:

I think the main thing is... being undocumented you know has definitely like inspired me to keep going and going, you know to not stop and to—I don't know, it's hard to explain. It's just something you feel, the will to do something. Like you're actually willing to push yourself to do something."

It seems that for Xochitl and other participants, the incentive power of their status has a logic even beyond the simple struggle narrative: It adds the strongly motivating dimension of injustice, the sense of being unfairly treated. Veronica's reference to "people that have pushed me down" and Xochitl's description of herself "going against something" – these indicate the sense of standing up against injustice. Few impulses equal the power of the individual's belief in the righteousness of a cause.

Discussion: “We’re Good People”: A Reality Check

In stating “It doesn’t make me feel like, Oh, America is mean to me. [...] Even though it is hard and frustrating most of the time, I still feel like I’m American now,” Francisco revealed how in spite of everything – in spite of his legal status – he cannot change the fact that he has come of age in this society and has to a large degree internalized its cultural values: “I still feel like I’m American.” On the other hand, he made it clear elsewhere in the interview that he was conscious of the implications of his legal situation: “Once I graduate, that will be a problem, if my status isn’t fixed. Cause how am I gonna work?”

And this, ultimately, is the quandary that all undocumented students must face. Even if they beat the odds and find a way to obtain a university degree, that accomplishment will only bring them to a new challenge: How will they find employment without documents proving legal residency? As daunting as the obstacles they face to complete their education are, these are more easily surmounted than the barriers to employment. Virtually all professional workplaces nowadays enforce strict rules regarding proof of employment eligibility. Unless some change occurs in the laws, unless significant policy reform – such as the DREAM Act²⁰ – is enacted at a federal level, they will find themselves at a veritable brick wall, an impasse for which few

²⁰ The “Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act” (S. 729, 2009) and corresponding “American Dream Act” (H. R. 1751, 2009) seek to create a pathway to “adjustment of status” for certain undocumented students who entered the U.S. as children, have completed high school or GED, and exhibit good moral character. Variations of these bills have been introduced since 2001, most recently in the 1st session of the 111th Congress, in 2009. Despite diverse and bipartisan support, the bills have never been brought for a vote.

remedies are apparent. Abrego (2006) sums up their situation:

Promising and previously high-achieving students – many of whom have internalized the US values of meritocracy and upward mobility through hard work – are forced instead to lower their aspirations, gain unlawful employment in low-wage industries, and often end their educational pursuits. (p. 225)

For the most part, the undocumented participants showed a reluctance to delve into this unhappy theme, or at a minimum insisted on maintaining a positive perspective, focusing on the virtues rather than perils. As Veronica stated: “I’m not here to destroy anybody’s world or to do anybody any harm.” Even so, lacking legal documentation conjures ominous implications – implications of which, needless to say, those in the U.S. Latino community are acutely aware.

A recent *New York Times* article (Bernstein, 2009), drawing on reports from the Homeland Security Department’s inspector general, the bipartisan group the Constitution Project, and the human rights organization Human Rights Watch, reported that immigration authorities utilizing a “a disjointed network that relies heavily on private prisons and county jails” have in the past decade detained nearly 1.5 million immigrants, who “are held unnecessarily and transferred heedlessly in an expensive immigration detention system that denies many of them basic fairness” (p. A25). The practice has been accelerating, with the majority of cases occurring in the past three years and the present rate estimated at nearly 450,000 per year. Those detained are often moved to remote locations: “Tens of thousands of longtime residents of cities like Philadelphia and Los Angeles being sent to remote immigration jails in Texas and Louisiana, far from legal counsel and the evidence that might help them win release” (p. A25). Partly in reaction to the terrorist attacks of 9-11, the past decade has seen a marked rise in the

treatment of immigrants as criminals (and the emergence of a field known as “crimmigration law”) and the dispersal of immigration enforcement to a inconsistent array of state and local authorities (Stumpf, 2008). In an era where workplace raids have become less common, immigration officials are reported to be implementing a strategy of infiltrating immigrant enclave communities. A recent account (Stevens, 2009) asserted that federal immigration agents “regularly impersonate civilians [...] in order to arrest longtime US residents who have no criminal history,” including incidents wherein “agents posed as OSHA inspectors, insurance agents and religious workers” (¶3).

For those who regularly view news programming on Spanish-language television in the U.S., few days pass without dramatic footage of undocumented immigrants being detained and deported. Images of federal agents detaining individuals, of families being separated, of children crying and parents being closed into law enforcement vans – all are mainstays on the nationally broadcast evening new programs of Telemundo and Univision. People who live in immigrant enclaves typically have friends or relatives who have been detained and/or deported, often as a consequence of something as innocuous as a routine traffic stop or a minor brush with authorities. In the very common instances of families made up of both documented and undocumented members, deportation can result in severe disruption and separations of indeterminate duration. This reality must weigh heavily on anyone who is undocumented or who has friends or family members of this status.

In the face of this, a normal response is to put up a brave front, as in Francisco’s “I don’t seclude myself and feel like I’m an outcast because of my status.” Asked if she

feared what could happen to her and her family members because of the immigration status issues of some of them, Xochitl replied:

I'm not afraid, just because I know either me or my family have done nothing wrong in this country. All we've pretty much done is, um, help this country because we consume here, we live here, my dad pays, all of us pay taxes, my dad bought a house... So it's like, you know, we have done nothing wrong here. We're only here to, I guess, to have a better life. We're actually trying. And, um, I'm not afraid at all. I'm more afraid of not actually having the opportunities, but not of what's gonna happen to me. I think we have a good record and, you know, I don't see why something bad could happen to us just because... I mean, people could check and, you know, they know we're good people, you know. We have done nothing wrong. We just came here to work, go to school, and pretty much that's it. So I'm not afraid, but My little brother sometimes, since he knows, stuff, he hears in the news like, oh they're deporting many people, and he's like, "I don't want you guys to get deported," and we just try to kind of explain it to him.

This contemplation shows the complexity of the issues: Echoing Veronica's "I'm not here to destroy anybody's world," Xochitl thrice repeats the claim that her family has "done nothing wrong," and she goes on to list their contributions to the larger society. They follow the rules, they stay out of trouble, they pay taxes, they do well in school, they purchase consumer goods – aside from that *one* thing, they are model citizens. Being an intelligent and well informed person, Xochitl is surely aware on some level that these claims would be of little use in fighting a deportation order; people exactly like her and her family are routinely detained and deported, as even her younger brother – a U.S. citizen by birth – has gleaned from the television. Yet Xochitl insists: "I don't see why something bad could happen to us."

This line of reasoning is of course unsettlingly reminiscent of tales told from other historical periods in which imperiled peoples placed their trust in their hosts. A particular (and hyperbolic) comparison suggests itself in the story of author Irène Némirovsky. As

related in a recent biography (Weiss, 2006), Némirovsky was born in Russia of Jewish descent, was raised speaking both French and Russian, and immigrated to France as a teen. She excelled at the Sorbonne and strove to assimilate into French literary society during the 1930s, publishing works which depicted unsympathetic Jewish characters, converting to Catholicism, and eventually writing for right-wing publications (which some historians posit she did only with the aim of protecting her husband and children from persecution). Despite her efforts to gain acceptance, she was denied French citizenship. Even so, in the face of impending Nazi occupation, Némirovsky and her husband were determined to stay in France, their “home,” convinced that their history there – their deeds, their French compatriots, their embrace of their new setting – would offer them protection.

Xochitl’s words aptly sum up the rationale behind this course of action: “I think we have a good record and, you know, I don’t see why something bad could happen to us just because... I mean, people could check and, you know, they know we’re good people, you know. We have done nothing wrong.” Yet, as undocumented immigrants in the U.S. learn every day, as Némirovsky learned when she was arrested in 1942, this defense is often no defense at all.

To be clear: I am not suggesting parity between the circumstances of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. today and those of European Jews during the Nazi genocide of the 1930s and 40s. The case of Némirovsky (who was executed in Auschwitz in 1942) is introduced here solely because it provides a well documented illustration of a dynamic in which, I posit, highly assimilated individuals can exhibit a kind of blindness to the peril

of their situations, a reluctance to accept the possibility that their friends, neighbors, and (as they perceive it) countrymen might fail to stand up in their defense. It is possible that individuals who strongly identify with a given group may find it difficult therefore to fathom how that group could be capable of an injustice such as discriminating against or persecuting people such as themselves, people who in their view have committed no wrong. By definition, assimilation implies internalizing the values (that is, the perceived values) of the larger society – if I am like them, how can I imagine them capable of doing that which I am myself incapable of?

This “blindness” may often prove advantageous. Though inhabiting a deeply assimilative stance may expose former (or presumably former) outsiders to a degree of risk due to their inability to fully grasp the possibility that their adopted peers might single them out for persecution or fail to defend them against such (as in the case of Némirovsky), certainly in many instances confidence in the protective power of assimilated identity ultimately proves warranted – as when newcomers are shielded from harm by sympathetic members of the larger group who reject the impulses of their own society (as in the case of those assisting undocumented immigrants in the U.S. today).

In any event, and regardless of their level of assimilation, undocumented immigrant families face the real risk of being uprooted, divided, and financially ruined. For young adults who have grown up in the U.S. and lack the cultural knowledge, academic training, and linguistic proficiency to prosper in the old country, being deported to an unfamiliar setting can imply a radically altered life trajectory and greatly impaired opportunities. It is not a death sentence, to be sure, but it is a dire fate, and one those who

immigrated as children risk entirely as a consequence of a status they did not choose.

And so, what they are left with is little more than the hope that things will change. Some become involved in efforts to publicize their predicament and promote positive action. Several of the participants mentioned the DREAM Act, with one reporting that she had been an active and public proponent of this legislation. Others made it clear that this was where they placed their faith:

Hopefully the whole DREAM Act goes through. But I mean there's been plenty of times that it comes up and it just disappears, or it gets voted down for some reason. (Francisco)

I have faith. I think it's about time [...]. I don't know if this year or next year, but I'm pretty sure, you know, I think soon, and I really hope so. (Xochitl)

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The objective of this investigation was to extend what is known about the experience of mid-childhood immigration among Latino students by way of recording and analyzing the narratives, perceptions, and judgments of individuals who had recently undergone this process. The focus of the study was further narrowed to those elements of the experience which bore upon participants' academic performance and achievement. The study sample was defined as including postsecondary students who immigrated from Latin America between the ages of 8 and 16, who had left high school no more than 5 years prior to being interviewed, and who had completed at least a semester (15 credit hours) of transferable college-level coursework. Three research questions were stipulated:

1. How do these students describe their experience from arrival in a new country during their school years, through school completion, and into a successful start at college?
2. In that experience, which variables – circumstances, characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, events – do the students perceive as being most supportive of their academic success?
3. Which variables do the students perceive as hindering or threatening their academic success?

The methodological principle guiding the conduct of interviews was that of the life story, a qualitative approach which seeks to provide a wide berth to participants in order to maximize their control over the course and content of their responses. As a result, the data collected were found to provide a broad and often nuanced picture of the experience of mid-childhood immigrants. As it is the nature and purpose of qualitative research, and especially narrative and life-story approaches, to seek to capture the complexity of experience rather than reduce it to easily-grasped survey items, I have in the following conclusions and recommendations (as in the discussion and analysis which were interspersed with the findings) attempted to reflect the rich detail of the stories these students told, and to discern and chronicle the themes and meanings present in those stories.

In this chapter, I set forth what I believe to be the most striking and significant insights that this research has provided to inform the understanding of the experiences of mid-childhood immigrants as a distinct class. These insights are presented in a form which enables educators and others to evaluate their likely usefulness and application to their own efforts to provide optimal learning opportunities to mid-childhood immigrant students.

This chapter does not attempt to review all of the features and themes related to the mid-childhood immigration experience which are addressed in the findings chapters. I believe that therein a reader may find a unique and richly detailed portrait of this life course, well worth close perusal by interested parties; however, given the sheer number and variety of themes which emerged from the data – an unavoidable consequence of the

open-ended life-story interview approach – it is not practical to delve into all of these in the present chapter.

Presentation of Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions are organized into four sections. Of these, the first two are focused on those variables (circumstances, characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, events) which, as evidenced in the interviews, participants perceived (a) to support their academic success, or (b) to hinder or threaten their academic success. These two sections, which address primarily the second and third of the research questions, are further subdivided as needed to provide focus on specific themes which participants deemed significant. The reader may assume that variables which are featured in the findings chapters but not addressed in these sections (e.g., academic tutoring, enclave residence, family language use, etc.) were found on the basis of the data to be less significant or to exert ambiguous effects on the academic success of participants.

The third and fourth conclusions sections represent somewhat of a shift of the locus of authority, presenting material derived more from interpretation of the narrative data rather than from participants' own judgments regarding their experiences (though needless to say this chapter as a whole is a product of interpretation of data). In the third section below, I offer discussion of the theme of self-perception and identity development, which for mid-childhood immigrants involves a complex and shifting admixture of ethnicity and distinct cultural pressures and which seems influenced to a surprising degree by individual choice. In the fourth, two additional themes are addressed which appear to be significant and compelling as well as unique in the literature: (a)

changes in personality and behavior as an outcome of migration in mid-childhood, and (b) the nearly universal incidence of children being excluded from decision-making and/or explicitly deceived by their parents regarding migration plans.

Following the conclusions, recommendations are offered. Foremost are those recommendations directed toward educators, given that a major aim of this project is to discern how the data and the analysis and interpretations thereof might inform decision-making in the interest of improving outcomes for mid-childhood immigrant students. The second recommendations section is directed toward parents of migrant children, while the third presents advice and recommendations which the participants offered to young people who find themselves in the same situation they once faced: total life-course upheaval due to migration at a formative age.

At appropriate points in the presentation of conclusions and recommendations, the situation of undocumented immigrant students – who comprise roughly half of those interviewed for this study – is addressed directly.

Conclusions: Variables Perceived to Support Academic Success

Roles of Family and Social Networks

In earlier studies, a majority of Latino college students cited parental involvement as a significant influence in their educational pursuits (Lopez, 2009), and academically successful Latinos reported feeling more encouraged by their families in their educational pursuits, and having fewer conflicts within the family (Alva, 1991). Strong family influence has been seen to highly correlate with academic resilience (McMillan & Reed, 1994). One role of family influence on immigrant children is to serve as a substitute and

possibly even a limiting agent for social interaction and the formation of strong peer networks. As culturally and linguistically distinct newcomers, immigrant children face obvious barriers to social networking; however, parents may also reinforce these barriers, viewing social contacts in an unknown setting as risky and the reduction thereof as a means of resisting what Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) describe as “a whole array of cultural models and social practices in American youth culture that they consider highly undesirable [including] attitudes and behaviors which are anti-schooling [...] and anti-authority” (p. 157).

Significance of Stable Family and Home Setting

In the case of Latino mid-childhood immigrant students, certainly the narrative data in the present study support the assertion that family plays a central role in their academic success; the importance of the family was seen to be unparalleled for virtually all of the study participants.

Though parents were described as able to contribute little in the way of guidance and mentoring specifically for the procedures and decisions related to college selection and admission, they were revealed as instrumental from earliest childhood in establishing stable and supportive home environments (if to a lesser degree living spaces conducive to studying) as well as in nurturing habits of discipline and maintaining the expectation that children dedicate real effort to their learning – in short, in concretizing what is often mere “lip service” about the value of education. In all but two cases, parents elected to migrate during the summer recess. Whether this decision was spurred by a desire to minimize disruption of their children’s schooling is unclear; however, given that significant

disruption is unavoidable in migration with children, the choice to do so at a time which would allow children to enter school at the start of an academic year likely served to reduce transition shock somewhat. In some cases, parents enrolled children in summer classes in order to prepare them for school and further mitigate disruption.

Most participants described their home settings as stable and emotionally supportive. In some cases, parents made the decision to assume the financial penalty of keeping one parent (the mother) out of the workforce in order to provide care and supervision of children. Only one participant described parents who took little interest in her activities, and another described the home setting as markedly stress-inducing and detrimental to her schoolwork.

Another family-related dynamic which clearly exerted a powerful influence on the academic performance of these mid-childhood immigrants was the awareness and recollection of family struggle; this is addressed under “Centrality of the Struggle Narrative” below.

Weak Social Network in Post-Migration Period

In contrast to family, the social group was found to play a shifting role in success, and a very limited role at the outset. For young immigrants, one consequence of moving far from the established childhood community is a temporary but marked reduction in the influence of peer or social groups. To varying degrees, participants described their reactions to leaving their friends and communities as a kind of bereavement.

For a young person, entering a complex and unfamiliar social environment such as a new school is fraught with the risks of missteps and unfavorable impressions. She

has no friends or allies, has not learned the particular rules that govern interaction, and is ignorant of background information which might help her navigate. To a large degree, she is at the mercy of her fellows. When this process occurs in an entirely alien cultural setting as well, the young person is at an even greater disadvantage: Her ignorance is deeper, her isolation more complete.

The social challenges confronting the mid-childhood immigrant at school are formidable, and research has indicated that the capacity to negotiate social networks is a key to resilience in young people (Benard, 1993). Participants described being shunned and ridiculed by their schoolmates, in some cases rather cruelly, because of their appearance, inability to communicate in English, and ignorance of their surroundings. Kids, in other words, will be kids. And in such cases it seems clear that individuals of uncommon sensitivity will be more negatively affected.

Although participants described rather quickly identifying peers among classmates who served to orient them and provide information about the new setting, they also reported feeling little real connectedness with the peer group in the months and even years following migration. For most, however, the continuation of a stable home and family environment despite its relocation seemed to counterbalance the reduced outside social contact. Though the participants described unpleasant feelings of loneliness and isolation during this time, these feelings were not characterized as overwhelming or intolerable.

Low non-family contact during the post-migration period was seen to have a positive influence on schooling. Given the low-income urban setting (a community which

suffers a full share of the social challenges normally associated with such environments), limited social interaction with peers may help immigrant children avoid adopting the separatist posture which can manifest in minority communities (Vigil, 2002), as well as “the anti-intellectual climate of U.S. adolescent culture” (Leki, 1999, p. 23). Participants indicated strong awareness of these dangers, with several expressing critical perspectives toward the behaviors of less-unified families in their community, where children in the words of one participant “roamed the streets all day [...] with kids at school, like bad influences” (Francisco). Another participant lamented that in the period after her arrival she spent nearly all her time with adults; however, she also admitted that this probably provided her with positive role models and helped her to avoid trouble.

Development of Affirming Social Networks

Fortunately for the young migrant student, over time almost invariably certain peers come forward to offer assistance, which often leads to friendship, and gradually the newcomer forms new social networks with these individuals. When asked to talk about people who helped her to succeed in school, Sara used a popular term to denote the less social and more bookish students, and went on to summarize the effect of her affiliation with them: “I used to be all the time with the nerds. And I think they helped me focus.”

A mechanism for making social connections which was consistently evident in the interview data was participation in sports, clubs, and other organized activities, usually beginning in high school. These programs, which are discussed in greater detail under “Organized Extracurricular Activities” and “Engagement On- and Off-Campus”

below, were seen to provide important socialization and adaptation advantages for participants, not least of which was the establishment of positive social connections.

As discussed above, a common part of the newcomer experience is a severe reduction in the extent and influence of the individual's social network during the post-migration period. In addition to avoiding disadvantageous influences, it seems that academically successful students profited in that those attachments which they did form over time tended to provide positive modeling and a social network mutually supportive of their educational goals. This tendency extended to college, where participants mentioned their low regard for classmates with lax study habits and of their ongoing avoidance of involvement with such students.

Institutional Influences

Although most participants described their school experiences in the new setting as confusing and even frightening at the outset, they also reported a generally hospitable atmosphere and nearly all related their early-day experiences with a degree of humor. The presence of school authorities who spoke Spanish was reported to be very helpful, though in the absence thereof, some participants described finding classmates who were able to translate basic instructions. Several participants spoke of particular teachers and staff members who were welcoming and helpful; none of the accounts described indifference, negligence or disrespect from school officials.

All of the participants were placed into bilingual or ESL classes on their arrival with one exception (whose parents insisted on placement into English-only classes and who quickly convinced them to reverse this ill-advised course of action). While most

participants accepted the utility of ESL/bilingual classes, notably positive portrayals of them and reactions to them were few; far more energy was invested in describing the shortcomings of the programs, as described below.

Bridge Program

A multi-faceted college “bridge program” was cited by several participants as instrumental to their fruitful transition from high school to college and their ongoing success at college. This program consisted of several parts:

- an intensive multi-week summer college study skills and preparation course,
- community learning or linked-cohort classes (in which all or most members of the group took two general education core classes together in the first two semesters),
- targeted and mandatory academic advising,
- mentoring (both on the informal level of peers and via a more organized plan in which students were assigned to willing faculty members), and
- involvement in activities meant to enhance feelings of connectedness with the academic community (e.g., clubs, student governance, conferences).

Another participant described a different though related bridge program which she attended during high school, with similar characteristics and objectives.

The experiences reported by these participants strongly support the validity of the underlying assumptions of these programs: That heightened and meaningful engagement can play a major role in academic resilience. In the case of most participants, this engagement was seen to play a more significant role in their success than, say, more academically focused services such as tutoring, which did not figure prominently in the

interviews.

Mentoring and Advising (Limited Effect of)

Outside the auspices of the bridge program, reports on the subject of advising and mentoring were far less positive – so much so that this is discussed below under the heading “Variables Perceived as Not Supporting Academic Success.” This is not to suggest an absence of mentoring and advising; in fact, several participants mentioned individual teachers and administrators who played roles in guiding and encouraging them in their academic endeavors. This kind of contact was viewed as very useful and important. However, the incidence of such mentoring and advising was extremely varied and inconsistent, and most was described as occurring by chance rather than by any design or intent on the part of their schools.

Organized Extracurricular Activities

In the course of talking about positive influences on their academic efforts, participants described involvement in extracurricular activities, both in conjunction with the bridge program and not. Whether this was a function of institutional design or individual initiative is not clear; in most cases, it was probably a combination. Several participants spoke of being recruited by coaches or pushed by mentors, though others – especially in the case of athletics – had been involved in such activities since earlier in childhood.

Engagement occurred on multiple levels, both within the school setting and beyond it. Indeed, a significant element of many of the activities described was the extension of engagement to the larger community. One example is organized sports in

high school and college, which enables students not only to assume defined and recognized roles within the social structure of the school but also to travel to other schools in the region and to interact with competitors, team supporters, and other community members. Another example is service clubs, where individuals volunteer to work in local senior centers or other neighborhood facilities. Finally, involvement in school governance and student leadership enabled participants to attend conferences, rallies, and events.

Engagement in the academic community beyond the classroom may hold particular value for mid-childhood immigrants due to its socialization and cultural adaptation functions. For students who occupy uncertain and vulnerable positions within the social structures of the setting where they are required to spend most of their days, organized extracurricular activities provide a mechanism which clarifies and solidifies their standing, discourages their interaction with potentially counterproductive peer groups, facilitates their feelings of belonging within the setting, and helps them develop a sense of connectedness to the larger society. In addition, attendance at conferences and events related to students' ethnicity may contribute to their development of a positive sense of identity and self-image.

Individual Characteristics, Attitudes, and Behaviors

The individual's development over time is a product of the interplay between the settings or ecosystems he inhabits (e.g., home, school) and those personal characteristics which the individual brings to those settings. Of course said characteristics are strongly influenced by previous experiences and settings as well; development is a complex

process of bidirectional influences across time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). Themes related to the home and school settings having been considered above, this section explores the personal traits which were found to be significantly implicated in the academic success of the participants.

Academic Orientation

Most participants expressed a rather surprising level of confidence in their academic capacities, citing specific accomplishments to support such claims. Though not immune to academic challenges, they showed a consistent tendency to take advantage of opportunities to augment their skills by way of not only personal initiative (several reported enjoyment of reading and learning in general, even when not required for school) but also formalized initiatives such as bridge programs. Many of the participants professed an interest in schoolwork going back to childhood, and in most cases described family customs which created and reinforced good study habits and in general showed that learning and formal education were valued.

It may be that in the face of bewildering environmental pressures and challenges, for those students with an aptitude and taste for “book learning,” the ability to immerse themselves in academic pursuits became another kind of comfort zone, akin to the home setting. In addition to offering a pathway toward the objective of attaining a more stable and comfortable life in the future, excelling academically also provided the advantages of positive feedback from teachers and other authority figures. For young newcomers struggling to find a way to fit in, such validation would surely function as a strong motivator.

The interview data strongly support the assertion that among academically resilient mid-childhood immigrants, educational goals are generally established early in life, together with a strong and abidingly favorable attitude toward education. In these regards, mid-childhood immigrants align with earlier studies in which early academic goal setting and positive attitudes toward education have been found to correlate with academic success (Bernard, 1993; Camburn, 1990; Heath, 1996; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Solis, 1995; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000; Waxman, Huang & Padron, 1997).

Positive Attitude toward English and Bilingualism

Participants spoke of the difficulty of learning English at the outset, several described a period of resistance to the language, and nearly all expressed some dissatisfaction with their present skills; however, all eventually forged functional relationships with the language, ranging from generally positive to very enthusiastic. On the more tepid end of the scale were those participants who viewed it as a useful tool and a means of advancement, while at the warmer end were those who referred to the idiom with the ardor of English majors.

In addition, all participants described favorable perspectives on the topic of their bilingualism. Though the intellectual and material advantages of bilingualism are contested by scholars (Lopez, 1999), this characteristic is highly esteemed by those who possess it, and among mid-childhood immigrants bilingualism seems to play a role in their self-image as fully participating members of a diverse society.

Given the prominence of reading and writing in U.S. higher education, it is not surprising that those destined for success in that milieu would profess not only

acquiescence to the necessity of using English but also some degree of appreciation and even affinity for the language.

Engagement On- and Off-Campus

Though the development of a significant social network outside the family was in most cases a process which took years, once the participants began to make social connections, they did so to a great extent within the highly controlled conditions of organized sports, school clubs, and other extracurricular activities, as discussed under the heading “Organized Extracurricular Activities” above. As noted there, it is not clear to what degree such involvement reflects personal characteristics of the participants versus institutional priorities, but in any case their involvement was voluntary and required significant investments of time and energy. Far less ambiguous is the generally beneficial outcome of participation and engagement. In addition to filling free hours that might otherwise have been spent in less productive ways (e.g., “on the streets”) and helping students to develop habits of discipline and focus, these activities proved essential in fostering cultural adaptation and feelings of connectedness within the school community. That participants perceived these behaviors to be valuable and enjoyable is evident in the fact that most continued them in the college years.

Positive Views on Immigration and Cultural Diversity

Interview data strongly support the notion of the “dual frame of reference,” the habit of immigrants to make comparisons between their present circumstances and those they left behind (Suárez-Orozco, 1989). Participants persistently engaged in such comparisons, frequently employing the expression “over there” in reference to the

country of origin, with the predominant (though not exclusive) effect of affirming the preferability of the present circumstances. The dual frame seemed to be essential to the maintenance of positive perspectives on the immigration experience in general, or more specifically on the prudence of their own migration, despite hardships and undeniable obstacles. This positive outlook was evident even in the cases of undocumented students, whose status represented a significant hurdle to social integration.

In addition, participants showed a marked appreciation for the “broadening” effects of the immigration experience, making frequent reference to the advantages of cultural diversity and their esteem for the high level of diversity they found in the new setting as opposed to the old. They described themselves as culturally curious, a trait evident in Xochitl’s account of her first days in the U.S.: “For me it was kind of a learning experience, like exploring. ‘Oh, it’s a new place! Let’s go here, and now let’s go here, let’s go to that store, you know, the corner store....’” For all its breathlessness, this is an apt illustration of “newcomer optimism,” one of the characteristics viewed as most essential for immigrants to survive and thrive in their new surroundings (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

The Struggle Narrative

Cohler (1990) described how individuals use the narrative theme of struggle against adversity as an organizing principle “that serves to manage meanings and to preserve the sense of self as coherent and integrated over time” (p. 184). The pervasiveness of struggle and triumph over adversity as a universal theme is evident in a description offered by Mischler (1986) of a study participant who presents an “image of

the self [...] to which he is laying a claim through his account of repeated trials” (p. 243).

Mid-childhood immigrants share a key trait with other groups that have faced prolonged adversity: When describing their life experiences, it becomes very clear that central to their self-perception is a narrative of struggle and of overcoming adversity. Discussing her strategies for maintaining her focus on her educational goals, Veronica observed: “What has helped me is that I see all this stuff we struggled with, all of it.”

More than simply another topic addressed in the interviews, the struggle theme imbues virtually all of the data. Mischler could have been describing any of the participants in this present study, as all repeatedly made comments like “it’s hard,” and “it was difficult” and Roxana’s “It was really really really sad sometimes.” Even the stalwart Jose admitted of the mid-childhood migrant’s experience: “It’s difficult, it really is.” Every aspect of the immigration experience – leaving home and loved ones, crossing the border, beginning school, adapting to the new culture, learning the language, making friends – was described in terms of struggle and difficulty.

As in most struggle narratives, the ultimate lesson is the eventual triumph over adversity. In at least half a dozen cases the immigration struggle was reflected also in the experience of participating in sports, a context in which this narrative arc could be neatly encapsulated and described in a context which the participants possibly found less distressing to countenance. In Daniel’s words: “It just showed me, if I didn’t die here, I’m gonna keep going. And that’s what happened.” This seemingly simple statement captures the logic of the narrative perfectly – the sense of facing an existential threat, the lack of

ambiguity about the correct course of action and unacceptability of failure, the sense of bravado in succeeding, even the allowance that perhaps a degree of luck or fate was involved: “And that’s what happened.”

The tendency of individuals to connect their unique stories to more universal narrative themes is described by Atkinson (1998) as “personal mythmaking,” an aspect of the life story which Atkinson deems of particular relevance to researchers seeking “to establish or understand how the sense of self has evolved over time, perhaps as a result of key transitional experiences” (p. 63). The narrative of migration as presented by the participants in this study is one of successful struggle against adversity, and in telling their stories this way they connect themselves to a larger fabric, as revealed on occasion when participants used the collective “we”: “We’re not located in this country, we’re just here, pretty much. We’re invisible to anybody” (Veronica).

Utility of the Struggle Narrative

Participants reported that the hard work and sacrifices of their families motivated them to pursue higher education, as described in Chapters Five (“Migration as Support/Threat to Family Unity”) and Six (“Motivational Value of Family Struggle”). In fact, the value (and hence the attraction) of the struggle/adversity theme seems to be its motivational power. In the interviews, these students referred again and again to their hardships and, even more, to the privations that their parents had endured, giving up social status, friends, and prospects for betterment so that their children might have improved opportunities. Participants on many occasions used the word “sacrifice” in describing both their parents’ experiences and their own, and in so doing revealed their

understanding of the ancient and literal sense of the word: a “sacred offering.” A sacred offering cannot be denied, and the participants made it clear that the knowledge of their struggles and their families’ struggles was the single most important, most compelling motivator for their perseverance.

A closely related dynamic was seen in the motivational utility of adverse family and community models. Several participants described their behaviors and their objectives in explicit contrast to that which they observed around them. While expressing no disrespect for relatives and immediate family members, they stipulated that the stressful and arduous life courses exemplified therein (e.g., curtailed educational plans, early marriage and childbearing, economic hardships) represented the diametrical opposite of their intentions. Their respectful tact was less evident in contrasting their life choices with those of others in the community whom they described variously as unfocused, undisciplined, complacent, and prone to counterproductive habits.

For mid-childhood immigrants, the struggle narrative also provides for a significant component of identity; their sense of self is tied to the story of their struggles and accomplishments in the process of coming to a new country and adapting to a new culture and language. Each success constitutes precedent and impetus for the next. Given the opportunity to describe their experiences as participants in this study – for some, perhaps most, the interview was the first time they had been asked to tell their stories – they related often moving and powerful narratives to describe, consider and interpret (perhaps to re-consider and re-interpret) their experiences, to conceive the meaning in their journeys. Some found the very act of telling their stories to be illuminating. One

reflected: “I think because of all this experience that I’ve been going through, [...] I grew up like in a different way, I do see a lot of things different.” Another wrote of the interview in a follow-up email, “It really helped me!”

The Incentive Paradox: Undocumented Status as Motivation

In the two preceding subsections, and drawing on data and discussions in Chapters Five and Six, an argument is presented for the prevalence of the struggle motif in the stories which participants in this study chose to relate of their experiences, and for the utility of that perspective as a driving force behind their ongoing efforts to develop. In Chapter Eight, a further claim is forwarded in regard to the functioning of this mechanism among undocumented immigrants (“Incentive Value of Undocumented Status”), a claim also supported by Oliverez (2006). If this interpretation is valid, if mid-childhood immigrants do derive a motivational effect from the struggles that they (and their families) endure, then in the case of undocumented students it might logically be supposed that the additional struggle imposed by their status would imply an even stronger motivational effect.

Evidence supporting this supposition was found in the interviews with those participants who declared their status to be undocumented; in several instances confirmation was asserted directly by participants. One said of her status: “It does make me work harder, my status and everything.” Another affirmed: “It motivates the hell out of me.” Others made similar representations, and overall this dynamic was found to be a common and striking feature among the undocumented participants.

This presents a striking paradox: The very thing which constitutes their greatest

obstacle is simultaneously that which they perceive to be among their greatest motivators. It might also be called a cruel irony but to keep to more neutral terms, I posit “incentive paradox” as an appropriate label for this phenomenon.

Conclusions: Variables Perceived as Not Supporting Academic Success

Inconsistent Advising and Mentoring

The differences between well funded public education and the poorly funded variety are readily observable as much in facilities and class sizes as in student advising. While high schools in more affluent municipalities employ knowledgeable and well connected counselors with limited student caseloads, those in economically pressured areas suffer from understaffing and the resultant ills of high caseloads and rapid turnover. This tendency is extreme in public schools such as those in the study community, which are among the lowest-funded and lowest-performing in Illinois (ISBE, 2008), a state which has widely disparate public education funding from district to district (Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, 2006; Orfield & Gaebler, 1991).

Thus it is not surprising that when asked to speak about where and from whom they received academic information and guidance, participants described rather hit-or-miss situations. In a few cases, they came to the attention (or placed themselves at the attention) of school counselors who provided useful information and advocacy. In other cases, specific teachers or other staff members were cited as being influential mentors. However, in most cases, evidence of reliable, systematic institutional advising and mentoring in public schools was in scant supply.

This scarcity was mirrored in reports about advising and mentoring at college as

well. Most participants described receiving information about their educational options from a mixed bag of family members, friends, and teachers. In most cases, it seemed that their success in obtaining useable information was the result of chance rather than design. Several participants reported receiving inaccurate information which in a few instances resulted in significant inconvenience, delay, and expense, as students took unnecessary classes.

A claim could be made that the cases charted in this study constitute evidence of an effective system of advising and mentoring: In spite of apparent inconsistencies, academic outcomes were largely favorable. These outcomes were predetermined, however, by the sample criterion which stipulated a set number of completed transferrable credits. What is not known is how many potentially successful students are pushed off an academic track due to inconsistent mentoring or inaccurate counsel.

Undemanding and Marginalized ESL/Bilingual Education

With few exceptions, participants expressed critical views of the ESL and bilingual education programs they were placed into upon arrival, and in which they remained for periods ranging from one to several years. Positive perspectives were also expressed, but with far lower frequency, and most participants who expressed positive opinions did so in the context of a generally negative view. Critical perspectives centered on three areas: (a) initial placement, (b) feelings of segregation in ESL/BE programs, and (c) lack of academic rigor and low expectations. Due to the combination of these concerns, several participants described their desire to escape ESL/BE programs and their efforts – often successful – to be moved into “normal” classes.

For the first of these concerns (and only the first), this researcher's two decades of experience in the field of academic ESL informs a reaction of guarded skepticism. Language learners very often have an inaccurate sense of their own proficiency level, and most commonly they err on the side of overestimation. For this reason, students often harbor the belief that they have been placed in too low a level, despite what placement testing indicates. However, in various instances participants in this study made reference to their English skills which suggested that their self-assessments were realistic and even unnecessarily deprecating.

The second criticism is less ambiguous, and was nearly universal in the study sample. Participants described how being part of the ESL/BE program marked them as marginal: different, separate, and lesser. More than one participant described feelings of being "in the corner" and one captured the sense of being set apart thus: "In ESL, regular students look at you like the weirdos over there." Teachers also were described as reinforcing this perspective; one participant reported her teacher's assurances: "If you really try hard we can move you to, just, be like everyone else, you know, in completely all English program." Participants spoke of sometimes protracted efforts to convince teachers to move them out of ESL/BE, and described such a move as a triumph.

Though it is possible that students' perceptions of ESL/BE classes as a kind of ghetto for misfits might serve a motivational function, offering the beneficial effect of making students work harder to get out, in fact none of the participants in this study characterized the situation in this way. It was also clear from their accounts that once they had managed to escape the ESL/BE ghetto, they adopted the same negative perspectives

that other “regular” students held toward students still there. In fact, looking askance at those in ESL/BE classes seemed in some cases to be evidence of acculturation: A sure and welcome sign of successful adaptation was a self-image of non- (or post-) ESL/BE identity. This is doubtless a large part of the reason that upon entering college, mid-childhood immigrants exhibit strongly negative reactions if told they must take ESL-type classes.

The third criticism of ESL/BE programs was closely tied to the second: That the programs lacked rigor and were to some degree an inefficient use of time. Several participants made comments like “I was never really pushed” and “They were really very lenient with us”; typically this was accompanied by expressions of regret: “I wish I had been pushed more.” In the most extreme instances, two participants regretfully described attending “bilingual” classes for years – ranging from two to several – before really being compelled to begin learning English. Though anger would not be an inapt response to such mis-education, participants described the experience with a degree of humor and a certain disbelief.

In addition to leniency and lack of rigor, participants saw the effects of ESL/BE as limiting their access to necessary knowledge; as one stated: “The regular students, they’d get more information than we did.” Other participants expressed the belief that being in ESL/BE for an extended period hindered their academic progress.

The effects of spending an extended period as an ESL/BE student can persist far beyond the school years. Enhanced by enclave residence, the result can be observed in individuals’ long-term relationships: Several participants reported having few English-

speaking friends even years later. One reported that the interview was the longest conversation she had ever had in English.

Perception of U.S. Schools as Lacking Rigor

Mid-childhood immigrants are in the unique position of being able to make direct comparisons between the schools they left in the home country and those they encounter in the new. In this study, the former held a strong advantage in the comparison: Only one participant asserted that schools in the U.S. were more academically demanding than those back home, while the near-universal perception was that U.S. schools were far behind. (This finding also aligned with strong views I have heard from Latin American students over many years.)

The effects of this academic lag were seen as both positive and negative. The positive result was that because much of the subject material (especially in math and science) had been learned previously, participants were able to focus on language learning without fear of falling too far behind their peers in internalizing course content. However, a negative outcome was also seen, that being a tendency among students to “slack off” and develop enduring counterproductive study habits.

Scarcity of Family and Community Knowledge about Higher Education

The scarcity and inconsistency of advising and mentoring within the educational setting were described in the section headed “Inconsistent Advising and Mentoring” (above). Further complicating this for study participants was the notably limited availability of information about educational options from their families and the members of their communities, as presented in Chapter Six (“Scarcity of Information and Expertise

for College Planning”). Taken together, the lack of ready access to information about selecting, assessing, and preparing for postsecondary academic paths places mid-childhood immigrant students, and particularly those who reside and attend school in immigrant gateway enclaves, at a distinct disadvantage over peers who enjoy better funded schools and whose families are familiar with the complexities of continuing education.

Challenges Related to Undocumented Status

As presented in Chapter Eight, undocumented immigrants face significant challenges in addition to those common to all newcomers. These include the emotional stress which arises from being viewed as an outcast, of living in the fear of being discovered and sanctioned (including the real possibility of detention and deportation), of feeling it necessary to conceal one’s status even from close friends, and of feeling unjustly treated by the larger society. In addition to these stresses, undocumented students face serious obstacles to financing their studies beyond high school, since they qualify for neither federal grants nor guaranteed student loans. For these reasons, participants reported feeling discouraged in regard to their educational options, and in most cases college plans were changed or reduced. One described how an undocumented friend ultimately abandoned his studies at GCC due to his perception of the hopelessness of his situation.

Regarding advising and mentoring for college planning, the situation of undocumented participants suggests that such students are at particular disadvantage in regard to seeking information about options which are available to them even in light of

their status. Though study participants did report some degree of success in finding this information, this success was limited and inconsistent, and their descriptions of the challenges and risks inherent in the search suggest that for undocumented students, advising and mentoring are both essential and problematic.

Finally, as difficult as their pursuit of a college degree may be, undocumented students face even greater obstacles once their studies are complete. At present, they have little concrete evidence that laws will change so as to allow them to obtain professional employment. Whereas attending college is difficult because of the lack of access to funding, they are not expressly disallowed from enrollment. This is in stark contrast to what they can anticipate in the workplace, a realization which weighs heavily.

Conclusions: Mid-Childhood Immigrant Identity

Among the most striking of the findings in this study is the substantial uniqueness of the mid-childhood immigrant identity and of the processes of thought and behavior which contribute to the development of that identity (as opposed to other immigrant and non-immigrant identities). Though marked by diversity, identity in mid-childhood immigrants also seems to involve key characteristics which are shared by members of that group and particular to them. In the nascent literature on mid-childhood or “generation 1.5” immigrants, a prevailing focus has been on more practical questions related to their learning and inclusion in the education system. Reference to identity is often limited to observations that these individuals identify with (or are strongly influenced by) both the sending and receiving cultures (Harklau, et al., 1999b; Roberge, 2003; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Such claims are supported by the present inquiry, but this

in itself does little to further illuminate understanding. The following section presents an interpretation of the data related to mid-childhood immigrant identity from this study with the intent of carrying this discussion forward.

Models of Immigrant Identity

Ofelia's assertion that "it doesn't matter which country I'm in" comes perhaps as close as any participant came to capturing the essential paradox of the mid-childhood immigrant identity: Grounded in two countries, she is truly grounded in neither, regardless of where she resides. But as revealed throughout the interviews (and discussed throughout the findings chapters), the mid-childhood immigrant is not pulled in only two directions. Within the enclave community are groups which favor and which reject assimilation, just as the larger society includes groups supportive and disdainful of immigrants. Even within the family, mid-childhood immigrants must balance their allegiances between home-culture parents and older siblings and new-culture younger siblings. As such, a predominant feature of immigrant identity as seen in this study might be characterized as an essential *non-belonging* – an ongoing process of negotiation between multiple and shifting influences, some of them from the cultures of their country of origin, some largely native to their adopted home, and some hybrids and idiosyncrasies.

What did not appear evident in the data, however, was a sense that this non-belonging occasioned undue distress or was perceived as dysfunction. While participants expressed awareness of the challenges inherent in establishing and maintaining a sense of self amid multiple competing influences, they did not profess to find these challenges

especially burdensome or even unpleasant. On other topics they readily expressed strong likes and dislikes, so a general reluctance to present negative perspectives was seemingly not a factor. Participants revealed not only an acute awareness that their lives would entail ongoing cultural navigation far beyond that which others – that is, peers and family members who did not immigrate in mid-childhood – would ever face, but also a level of comfort with and acceptance of that condition, a sense that the gains outweighed the losses, even a sense of pride in their “diversity.” Tellingly, while participants described numerous difficulties and negative feelings in the course of their migration narratives, in no instance did they express a wish that they could go back, undo the experience, and revert to a more unified, non-immigrant identity. In fact, a general sense emerged that they perceived childhood peers who had not migrated as “stuck” in a monolingual and monocultural worldview, a position which was clearly not coveted.

This finding aligns with earlier studies on migrant experience and identity, which also suggest further insights into the identity-forming processes, pressures, and features which participants described. A persuasive body of research indicates that among younger immigrants, adaptation and acculturation do not necessarily presuppose abandonment of the old, but rather the integration of the cultural values and customs of the home country with those of the new, the “simultaneous ethnic retention and adaptation to the new society” (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001, p. 502). The integration model of acculturation, closely akin to what Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) term transcultural identity, is viewed as not only possible and commonplace, but optimal. In a comprehensive review of relevant research, Phinney, et

al. (2001) affirm that “the literature has generally shown integration [...] to be the most adaptive mode of acculturation and the most conducive for immigrants’ well-being” (p. 502, with reference to Berry, 1997; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Berry & Sam, 1997; and Howard, 1998; see also Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Lafromboise, Coleman and Gerton (1993), referencing the much earlier work of anthropologists Goldberg (1941) and Green (1947), describe how “people who live within two cultures do not inevitably suffer,” and that the bicultural experience “is disconcerting only if the individual internalizes the conflict between the two cultures” (p. 395).

As discussed in Chapter Seven, a wide spectrum of environmental influences determine how an individual perceives cultural differences and cultural shift. But what the data from the present study also suggest, arguably, is that for individuals who migrate during that stage in life when the potential for profound developmental transformation occurs in conjunction with an emerging consciousness of the mechanisms behind such transformation, determinant identity features such as the internalization of cultural conflict are to varying degrees a matter of personal choice – and as such, of personal empowerment.

Choice and Empowerment in Mid-Childhood Immigrant Identity

Immigrating during mid-childhood can be a profoundly empowering experience. The life-course which is acutely diverted during a crucial period of development permits an individual to very tangibly consider the “What if?” of having taken the other fork in the road (or of simply not having come upon a fork at all). Of course the person who remains in largely consistent circumstances throughout life – the

monolingual/monocultural – may hypothesize about how moving to France or running off with a traveling circus at fourteen might have changed them, but they have no concrete experience with this magnitude of change and so the exercise is purely hypothetical.

The person who has experienced a genuine transformation, in contrast, can draw upon concrete knowledge of life before, during, and after the change – a condition mid-childhood immigrant and writer Mary Antin (1912) recalled as being “consciously of two worlds” (p. 2). When Sara says, “I have wondered how my personality would have formed if I didn’t come here. How would I be different?” or when Jose says “What would have been if I had stayed and lived in Mexico? What would I do, where would I work, how would I think?” they are not engaging in idle speculation. Their own experiences and that of the friends and relatives they left behind provide solid, compelling evidence to inform the question.

What the experience of mid-childhood immigration teaches those who undergo it is that who we are – our personality, our self-image, our identity, our *thinking* – are malleable notions, determined not only by the accidental conditions of our lives, but also the conscious choices we make. Unlike those who move from infancy to adulthood in the same environment, the mid-childhood immigrant has inhabited a life which provides hard evidence of how profoundly her surroundings and circumstances have shaped her identity, and thus – because her life experience has also shown her the extent to which individuals are able to manipulate that environment and those circumstances – to conceive of how much control she herself has over her identity. For some, this knowledge

can be unpleasantly disorienting and even debilitating, while others find it empowering and liberating.

The findings presented in “Alienation, Individuation, and Integration: Mid-Childhood Identity” in Chapter Seven highlight the central role of individual choice in self-image and identity development, and the perception among participants that they possessed the power to affect their life outcomes by way of the choices they made. Not limited only to outwardly manifested behaviors, relationships, and activities, the scope of individual choice was seen to include also feelings and attitudes. Participants repeatedly referred to attitudes, feelings, and perceptions which they consciously desired and sought or intentionally avoided.

For example, while previous research indicates that bicultural individuals can avoid disquiet if they do not perceive the two cultures as necessarily being in conflict (Lafromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993), the present study suggests that this perception is to some degree a matter of choice. In one example, Jose stated regarding his cultural influences: “Culture-wise, we’re not too separated, the Mexican from the American culture.” However, he later described rather significant differences in the cultures. Thus it might be posited that his assertion of their similarity was not a categorical conviction, but a tactical choice, born of an intuition that choosing to de-emphasize the differences might help minimize cultural dissonance and smooth the edges of his identity.

Ultimately, participants demonstrated an inherent and comfortable understanding of the notion that who they are is a work-in-progress, that as characterized by Tartakovsky (2009), “cultural identities are hybrid and flexible constructs” (p. 668). In

the case of mid-childhood immigrants, the hybridity and flexibility of these constructs are necessarily exaggerated. Presumably not having read the literature on the topic, Daniel nonetheless described the mid-childhood experience with remarkable acuity:

When you come when you're born, you're mostly to have the American culture, if you can put it that way. And if you come older, you are like, you're gonna stick with your roots, basically. And I noticed that all the students that came during the period that I came [...] I see that they embrace both cultures. Not necessarily that you assimilate completely, cause I don't think there's like assimilation that's like complete assimilation, that's one thing I don't believe in, but I mean that you can have more cultures, you can go back and forth really easy.

Daniel seems to embody what Phinney, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) described as the multicultural individual who is able to “maintain a positive identity as a member of his or her culture of origin while simultaneously developing a positive identity by engaging in complex institutional sharing with [...] other cultural groups” (p. 401).

This is not to say that the participants in this study expressed a particular sense of consistency or unity in their cultural makeup – they readily recognized that this makeup is multi-leveled and unsettled – but rather to suggest that it does not follow that this makeup is therefore equivalent with fragmentation, incompleteness, confusion, or distress. Indeed, while articulating their cultural multi-facetedness, the individuals did not express any particular unease about it, nor did they describe it as a deficit. In contrast, they unanimously viewed this part of their experience as either neutral or positive.

Mid-Childhood Immigrant Identity as Liminality

Given the options commonly parlayed in existing literature, the notion of the “integrated” identity seems most apt to describe the identity outcomes evident in the narrative data presented here. However, this construct falls short of conveying the sense

of motility which seems characteristic of these participants' identity. Though integration captures the trait of multigenesis, of the identity derived of two or more disparate sources, it also suggests a static or settled quality which does not seem to reflect what participants in this study experience. Ima and Rimbaut (1988), who coined the term "1.5 generation" for mid-childhood immigrants, described them as existing "in the interstices" (p. 2) between cultures.

Echoing Ima and Rimbaut, the present study suggests theirs is a position which might be defined as marked by liminality, by the constant presence (or possibility) of movement between disparate cultural tendencies. Using the term "liminal" to describe the mid-childhood immigrant identity also brings into play the notion of an in-between or "interstitial" position, which the integration model does not suggest. Just as they divide their life stories into "here" and "over there," describing themselves with a foot in each place ("it doesn't matter which country I'm in"), individuals who undergo the life-changing transition of migration during their formative years seem to be deeply imprinted with a sense of a self inhabiting the space which separates: Fully grounded neither in the present (and future) "here" nor in the past "over there," they occupy a liminal ground which entails both, an in-between space where, in Daniel's words, "You can have more cultures, you can go back and forth really easy."

The Affiliation Paradox of Undocumented Students

As explored in "Unauthorized Status and Cultural Affiliation" in Chapter Eight, the narrative data from the majority of those participants who reported being undocumented indicated a tendency which was initially surprising, though on reflection

its logic became evident: They seemed, possibly to an even greater degree than the legally documented participants, to exhibit significant assimilation and internalization of the host culture values. Despite the barriers to integration which the host society maintains against them, these individuals were more likely to express affinity for the values of that society, more likely to assert an identity based mainly in that society, and more likely to be critical of individuals and groups they perceived to be in opposition.²¹ One of the undocumented participants expressed a preference for the company of non-Latinos, one spoke in defense of the immigration agents who detained her family after an unsuccessful border crossing attempt; none expressed strong anger or resentment toward the society which denies them official membership.

One of few researchers focusing on the acculturation of undocumented students, Abrego (2006) found that

socially, undocumented youth are indisputably full-fledged members of US society – even if only at the lower rungs of the economic ladder. After having been educated in our schools, they speak English (often with more ease than Spanish), envision their futures here, and powerfully internalize US values and expectations of merit. (p. 227)

Though this is clearly a blanket statement, it seems largely applicable to the undocumented participants in this study. This tendency of undocumented immigrants to “powerfully internalize US values” is most likely the result of a pair of conditions particular to individuals of this status: the length of time they have spent in the host culture (or more accurately, the proportion of their formative years), and the enforced and

²¹ The design of this study does not support this contrast and correlation as an empirical claim beyond simply observing that it occurred within the sample. Further study would be required to establish whether this is a generalizable or transferable finding.

continuous separation from the home culture due to their inability to travel freely. The former condition supports acculturation and assimilation in the new setting, while the latter simultaneously weakens ties with the country of origin.

Echoing the “incentive paradox” proposed above, the term I posit to denote the consequence of these circumstances is “affiliation paradox,” in which environmental conditions support the development of identity and cultural traits seemingly at odds with the reality of the individual’s situation. For the participants in this situation, this paradox is reconcilable not in the present but only in the future: They have few options but to cling to the optimistic hope that immigration laws will change, or at the very least that they will be able – via marriage or some other mechanism – to regularize their status.

Conclusions: Other Significant Features of Mid-Childhood Immigrant Experience

Among the many categories of findings that emerged from this study, the following two are striking not only because they were strongly evident in the data and nearly universal among participants, but also because I found them to be unexpected, despite the extensive review of literature related to the immigrant experience that I undertook prior to data collection (see Chapter Two). The first of these is the incidence and degree of changes to personality and behavior that participants described in themselves during the period following arrival and including their initial experiences at school. The second relates to the equally ubiquitous and pointed references to parental deception regarding their migration plans and intentions, and their exclusion of children from the decision-making process. An additional significant element of the latter phenomenon is the sense of persisting resentment (and mystery) in regard to the

deception.

Personality and Behavior Change in the Post-immigration Period

It seems obvious and even natural to expect that an individual entering a new environment should feel out of place and as a result become hesitant to interact with others for some period of time. This can be jarring even for adults, who enter the new setting with a fully formed sense of self and the capacity to predict and comprehend on an intellectual level how the experience might affect them. For mid-childhood immigrants, this experience takes on far greater significance: Just as the new setting leaves a deep and lasting impression upon them, so too do their own reactions to it.

Nearly all participants reported having been adventurous and outgoing children before migration and then entering a period beginning immediately after arrival of withdrawal and social isolation, describing themselves with words like “shy,” “intimidated,” “distant,” “lost,” “withdrawn,” “traumatized,” and “confused.” In some instances, participants described their younger selves in the third person – “I see that girl, so confused” – perhaps in an attempt to separate themselves from that difficult time.

Profound personality change was reported regardless of the age on arrival within the mid-childhood range; later migration (at a stage of presumably more established sense of identity) did not seem to ameliorate the effect. The duration of the withdrawal period did seem to vary considerably, however, with some participants reporting rather quickly establishing friendships and others describing far more protracted efforts. In one case, a cycle of migration, re-patriation and re-migration, combined with the expectation of another re-patriation, served to extend the participant’s period of self-imposed isolation

(even, she asserted, from her own family) for several years. In most cases, arrival in an ethnic and linguistic enclave seemed to accelerate their efforts to make new social connections (though this may also have created barriers to later integration into the larger society, as discussed in Chapter Seven).

One side-effect of the absence of a social network after arrival is the increased prominence of the immediate family in the individual's experience (as discussed in "Effects of Immigration on the Family" in Chapter Five), as relationships within the home setting are essentially all that is available to counterbalance the loss of a rich and complex network of extended family, lifelong friends, and close-knit communities. Those mid-childhood migrants who have the good fortune of inhabiting a supportive and healthy nuclear family environment, and those who have additional relatives in the new setting, seem to be at a distinct advantage over those who lack such resources. Not surprisingly, among the participants in this study – defined in part by their successful transition – a common characteristic seemed to be stable and supportive families. Also not surprisingly, several participants alluded to what they observed to be common and far less appealing alternative refuges to which their peers sometimes turned when they found their family lives to be unsupportive: gang membership, criminality, and drugs.

The question of how the mid-childhood period of isolation and withdrawal affects young immigrants over the long-term is worthy of further study. One part of this question which the present inquiry seems to inform is that participants did eventually emerge from the most extreme isolation of that period, and in keeping with the triumph-over-adversity theme they described the experience as ultimately empowering. Interestingly, one

common characteristic of mid-childhood experience may play a serendipitous role in limiting another: Being pressed into service translating for parents and helping them manage relations with the outside society may support the process of overcoming isolation. Participants described how in helping their families in this way, they had gained “more confidence” and lost their fear of communicating with strangers and persons in authority. Ellen contrasted her situation in this regard with a more assimilated younger sibling: “So now I’m not shy about speaking to anyone, anywhere. Whereas my sister, who never had to translate a word, you know if you tell her, ‘Go ask the bus driver what stop we need,’ she completely refuses.”

Feelings of Deception by Parents Regarding Immigration Plans

An especially striking and nearly universal feature emerging from the data concerns participants’ accounts of being obliged to migrate during childhood with little regard to their wishes or feelings, and often under explicitly false pretenses, as discussed in “‘We’re Going to Disney!’: Lying to Children about Migration” in Chapter Five. Participants revealed strong and ongoing emotional responses to these circumstances.

The first circumstance, having little or no say in the decision to migrate, is hardly surprising: A common experience of childhood is being told what to do by adults. However, the second circumstance of that migration – that it was presented to them under false pretenses, using what might be termed the “Disney strategy” – represent an especially puzzling element.

Why would parents intentionally mislead their children about what is possibly the most significant event of their childhood? Perhaps this strategy is seen as a helpful

fiction, a way for parents to reduce the separation anxiety of children (and themselves) on leaving. Long after completing the data analysis for this study, I discovered a strikingly similar version of the “vacation” lie related by memoirist Alvarez (1998) in regard to her family’s migration to the U.S.; Alvarez, who was ten at the time, hypothesized that her mother had simply “decided to trick us to calm us down” (p. 18).

In the case of those who entered illegally, or who entered on tourist visas with the intent to remain, perhaps parents did not want to risk the possibility that children would reveal their plans to immigration officials. However, in no case did a participant mention that parents later attempted to explain their actions, and in fact several participants specified that their parents had never made any such attempt.

In the cases of families with one or more undocumented members, even if they did in fact intend to return to their country of origin after a short visit, very possibly the increased severity of border enforcement during the past several years made it too risky to cross, leaving families to face difficult choices: the possibility of the family (or, worse, some members of the family) not being able to return to the U.S. in the future. Plans by nature are subject to change with changing circumstances, and it is impossible to ascertain from the study data whether the original plans were made in earnest or why the plans were not carried through.

Recommendations for Educators

To maximize immigrant students’ likelihood of college success, they ideally should be born into an urban middle-class background and be raised by university-educated parents who from the earliest age emphasize the importance of schooling while

providing stability, support, and guidance. Personal traits such as intelligence, natural curiosity, language aptitude, and a love of reading also help. Unfortunately, neither educators nor the students themselves can significantly manipulate these conditions.

Specifying which of those conditions affecting academic success are beyond our reach as educators and educational policy makers serves to enable us to focus on those conditions we *can* influence. And it is just these that the recommendations outlined here will address, seeking to answer the question: What does this study suggest educators can do to support the academic efforts of mid-childhood immigrant students and enhance the likelihood of their success?

First, however, it is important to note that as college students, the participants in this study did not perceive their academic performance in itself to present a major problem. Though certain aspects of their status – as members of an ethnic minority group, as community college students, as residents of low-income communities, as graduates of underperforming high schools, as non-native English speakers – would seemingly place them into a number of “at-risk” categories, they described themselves for the most part as applied and diligent students who fretted little about their classroom execution and progressed consistently toward their academic goals. They reported minimal use of support services such as tutoring and with few notable exceptions characterized their relationships with teachers and peers as harmonious. As a long-time teacher myself, I would judge that these participants fit most descriptions of the “good student.”

However, this agreeable picture may conceal a history of struggle against multiple and vexing challenges, beginning upon their arrival and persisting into college. These are

challenges which do in fact have the potential to seriously compromise their efforts.

Fortunately, in many cases they are also challenges which educators and institutions can significantly mitigate with the application of judicious and practicable policies and actions – as recommended below.

For lack of a better place for it, I will include here a brief commentary on the funding of public schools. As mentioned at various points in this document, the state in which the study was conducted, Illinois, represents a dire exemplar of the most inequitable educational funding distribution policies in the nation. This is not an issue particular to immigrant education except in that many immigrants (such as those who participated in this study) reside in densely populated urban communities with lower property values where, as education funds are largely determined by local tax revenues, the public schools suffer from extremely unfavorable and inequitable funding levels. This creates and perpetuates vastly disproportionate conditions in schooling, placing students in those communities at a significant disadvantage in comparison to their peers in wealthier areas who attend schools which in some cases spend nearly *five times* as much per pupil. Surely if educators and those involved in education policy-making have an interest in the equitable treatment of children, they should work toward reform of these regressive and oppressive funding formulas.

Review “Triage” Procedures for Incoming Immigrant Children

The child’s very first experiences at a new school are preserved in memory quite vividly, and most likely color the child’s perceptions far beyond that initial response. The quality of academic experience they get in the first year or two is key; those who receive

inadequate or inappropriate instruction, those who are shuffled around, those who are left to fend for themselves, suffer.

The very first day of arrival can be in itself somewhat perilous. In many cases, the actions participants described school officials taking on their arrival seemed somewhat haphazard and ad hoc. Some students were shuffled from place to place, some were unaware of where they were supposed to go on their first day. One described having to find classmates who could translate for him. One described being allowed to take a bus to a distant and unknown school.

Inconsistency and discontinuity seemed to persist beyond the first days as well. Some were moved from school to school repeatedly due to the availability of programs. One was kept in an ESL program beyond the point at which this seemed appropriate simply because there was no space in non-ESL classes, and another was moved out of ESL seemingly prematurely also because of space rather than pedagogical concerns.

Educators who are charged with integrating newly arriving immigrants into school programs have a particular obligation to not only provide adequate curricula but also to ensure that those immigrant students are placed according to their needs into appropriate programs. Policy makers in particular need to work toward adequately funding such efforts. Sadly, of course, public anti-immigrant sentiment all too often influences legislators to work explicitly against funding those programs which are designed to support students in this situation.

Ensure Academic Rigor of ESL/BE Programs

It is hard to overstate the importance of effective, rigorous, and timely ESL/BE

programming for immigrant children, and the accurate placement of newly arriving students in those programs. Although the question of whether a “critical period” for second language acquisition (usually posited as prior to adolescence) is highly contested, considerable research indicates that immigrants who begin learning a new language during mid-childhood achieve higher proficiency than those who begin later (Krashen, 1979; Krashen, Scarcella & Long, 1982; Long, 1990; Singleton & Langyel, 1996), and one major study found that the time children needed to achieve proficiency increased significantly after the age of 11 (Collier, 1987). In an extreme example of how what is billed as bilingual education can fail to serve students’ interests, two participants reported spending years in classes in which their “bilingual” teachers could speak little or no English. One of these, arriving at the age of 9, reported that she did not truly begin learning English until she was 13, an experience which led her to intuit what language acquisition researchers have learned through extensive inquiry:

I think those children who come from Latin America should go straight to English classes. Because they’re small and they could pick it up fast, and it would not be hard for them later on. I think at like 12 years old, it’s kind of hard. I started to learn English when I was like 13 years old, when I was in 8th grade.

Indeed, this participant’s linguistic profile as evidenced in her interview revealed that, rather than the nearly accent-less speaking proficiency that is common among children who begin language acquisition at an earlier age (including other participants in this study), her English was strongly marked with non-native features.

Even among those who arrived at roughly the same age, a clear distinction can be observed in language facility (and in self-reports of the same) between those who were placed into effective bilingual or ESL programs early on and those who were not. Like

Ellen, some reported being placed into “bilingual” programs in which neither the teachers nor students spoke English regularly. If those who learned little English at the outset reported a stronger ability in and connection to Spanish as a result, this positive outcome might be viewed as a counterbalance to the negative of weaker English skills. However, this was for the most part not seen to be the case: Even those who expressed a preference for using Spanish in everyday communication also expressed concern regarding their limitations with that language. Of her Spanish, Ellen reported: “I’m afraid of that, because if I move to Mexico, I’m gonna have problems.” In such cases, the old (and often rejected) commonplace about “dual illiteracy” seems unfortunately close to apt.

Significantly, it was the students themselves who expressed their dissatisfaction with what they perceived to be the low expectations of teachers who seemed more interested in ensuring that students had “fun” than that they made progress. Several participants mentioned that they had not been “pushed” to learn English, and in some cases (as mentioned above) they reported that their teachers seemed unable even to model the language effectively.

Seek to Minimize Marginalization of ESL/BE Students

With near unanimity, participants in this study described their experiences in ESL and bilingual education in elementary and high school in terms of their separation from the “normal” or “regular” life of the school. They felt segregated not only academically but socially, and in some cases felt that they did not receive the full benefits afforded other students. Some seemed also to have internalized negative perceptions of ESL/BE

students and upon exiting those programs they in turn viewed their peers who remained behind in the same light.

This is a thorny issue for educators, since certain characteristics inherent in those students who are placed into ESL/BE programs on arrival – their linguistic and cultural differences – exist outside any immediate institutional remedies, and naturally give rise to segregative tendencies within the academic community. Nonetheless, it seems that educators could take measures to minimize these tendencies and to create an atmosphere in which ESL/BE students are integrated into the life of the school as fully as possible. The present study did not, unfortunately, yield much in the way of specific suggestions in regard to interventions which might accomplish this task.

The one program which participants found to be useful and in some cases transformative – the college bridge program – did not come until later in their studies, when arguably they were themselves more adapted to the new setting and better prepared to make a meaningful transition. It may be, however, that certain features of the bridge program (described in the following section) could be applied to initiatives at an earlier stage of the immigrant experience. In particular, the bridge program places a high premium on student involvement in non-academic campus activities with the aim of fostering feelings of connectedness and engagement.

Similarly, several participants spoke of the value of their involvement in clubs and organized sports in elementary school and especially high school. It is possible that schools could more fully and systematically leverage such endeavors to support the integration of newly arrived immigrant students.

Consider College Transition or “Bridge” Programs

As noted in the introductory part of this section, the participants reported few concerns in regard to their class work. As such, this study does not necessarily support various proposals in the literature to create special academic tracks or tutoring services or to modify instruction at the college level to accommodate mid-childhood immigrant students (Harklau, et al., 1999a; Roberge, 2003), though it is perhaps more accurate to say that the study simply does not speak to this question: By selecting academically successful students, it possibly excluded those whose cases might argue in favor of such interventions.

The interview data did, however, strongly support the effectiveness of measures such as the college “bridge program” in which several interviewees had participated. As described in Chapter Six, the hallmarks of this grant-funded initiative included:

- coordination with local high schools to identify at-risk candidates who might benefit from participation;
- a summer intensive study program prior to the first semester focused on making the transition from high school to college, including both academic “brush-up” content as well as material designed to prepare students for the “culture” of college (e.g., expected behaviors, effective habits);
- substantial opportunities and encouragement for students to form mutually supportive social networks, typically via prolonged interaction in cohort classes;
- regular mentoring with knowledgeable faculty and other staff;
- engagement in relevant extracurricular activities such as clubs, campus

volunteering, student leadership, and minority education conferences; and

- financial support in the form of scholarships contingent on successful participation in the program.

This type of program is designed to combine academic preparation with the well established advantages of engagement (Tinto, 1975, 1987), the latter aspect being of particular value to the ongoing efforts of newcomers to adapt and acculturate. Though it was not created specifically for mid-childhood immigrants, study participants described the GCC program to be effective and even instrumental in their success. In fact, its inclusion of students from a variety of backgrounds may enhance its value as a force for integration of disparate parts of the student body. The non-specific nature of such a program may also be a selling point for policy makers: With a single initiative, it seems, the efforts of a variety of at-risk students can be supported.

Emphasize Proactive Advising and Mentoring

With few exceptions, participants described the advising and mentoring that they received on the topic of higher education as inadvertent and even accidental – they happened to meet a knowledgeable person, or a relative or acquaintance worked at a local college. Such naturally occurring connections are surely beneficial; however, in the context of low-income and immigrant communities, relying so heavily on serendipity places students at a disadvantage. Even in wealthier areas, where parents and community members have far more knowledge of educational options and how to access them, institutions invest heavily in student counseling and advising.

To make progress toward a more level playing field for students in less

advantaged settings, educators should explore ways to make advising and mentoring more systematic. One means of achieving this is seen in the design of the bridge program described above, particularly in the coordination of efforts between high school and college. In general, and as ever, funding such efforts represents a major challenge. (The bridge program in question was supported by federal grants, soon to expire, with no means of further support.) Though face-time and one-on-one contact are invaluable, educators working in less advantaged settings should explore ways of effectively providing information within the limitations of their context, efforts which might possibly be augmented through group advising and seminars, and/or programs involving community members on a volunteer basis.

Explore Ways to Help Undocumented Students

The challenges inherent in navigating through life and school without documented immigration status are outlined in Chapter Eight, with further references to these issues appearing throughout the findings. These challenges encompass substantial material, legal, and emotional components, some of which young people of this status may attempt to minimize when describing their circumstances.

Regarding their schooling and higher education, undocumented individuals can be caught in a kind of Catch-22 in regard to obtaining advice and mentoring: The legal ramifications of their status can make students reluctant to disclose it, while not knowing this detail can make it difficult for advisers and mentors to provide useful and relevant information.

For advisers and mentors, offering assistance to undocumented students raises

complicated issues. By federal law, educators at the elementary and secondary levels should neither attempt to determine the legal status of immigrant students nor restrict enrollment on that basis. This ruling is predicated on the argument that children should not be held accountable for and should not suffer as a result of actions committed by their parents. The right of equal access to education does not apply beyond secondary school, however, and as a result some educators may be uncomfortable providing information and assistance to undocumented students as regards their post-secondary plans. Views on this issue have political and ethical dimensions which individual educators must weigh before proceeding.

For those who believe that undocumented college (or college-bound) students are deserving of assistance, the following recommendations are offered:

- *Make information openly available.* In educational settings where undocumented students are likely to be present (this includes virtually any institution, anywhere), school authorities could provide information specifically pertinent to that population openly and as a matter of course, eliminating the need for individual students to identify themselves by seeking it.
- *Publicize the availability of safe and sympathetic advising.* Counselors and mentors who wish to be of assistance to undocumented students should identify themselves within the academic community, offer their assistance to students who might need it, make (and warrant) assurances of confidentiality, and inform themselves about the relevant issues and any avenues of assistance for such students. (A simple internet search can lead to much useful information.)

- *Be discreet.* The need for confidentiality in individual cases is essential, but discretion in general is important as well. As noted in Chapter Eight, given the controversial nature of undocumented immigration, many individuals hold strongly critical views of any attempt to provide assistance to students in this situation. When materials are made public – such as lists of scholarships available to this cohort – the effect can be counterproductive, such as funders redefining the requirements for scholarship eligibility. Though strict secrecy about the predicament of undocumented students is neither possible nor helpful, in individual cases and in regard to specific remedies, discretion may be advisable in the interest of avoiding unwanted interest.
- *Advocate for funding.* Denied access to federal grants and guaranteed student loans, undocumented students report that their greatest challenge is funding their post-secondary studies. Colleges and universities can seek resources to provide alternatives to these students.
- *Observe eligibility requirements.* Where rules and laws do not stipulate legal immigration status requirements for given resources, institutions should respect that omission and ensure that all qualified students have access.
- *Advocate for legislative action such as the DREAM Act.* Ultimately, for the many thousands of undocumented students who have graduated from high school in recent years and who will graduate in the coming years, their best hope for securing a stable future for themselves and their families, for engaging in meaningful employment, for contributing to U.S. society as their abilities warrant,

lies in substantive reform of the immigration laws which pertain to them.

Though some may manage to regularize their legal status by way of measures such as marriage or their inclusion in special classes (e.g., refugees, asylum seekers, victims of domestic violence), for the great majority the only likely solution will be legislated reform.

Recommendations for Parents

Recognizing the very low likelihood that the parents of immigrant children will read this study, I offer the following brief discussion nonetheless in the hopes of simply raising general awareness of the issues within those members of the academic community who might happen upon this document, with the attendant expectation that they share such with others, including any immigrant parents with whom they might be in communication.

The first recommendation is a tribute to the parents of the participants in this study: Providing a stable and supportive home environment is almost certainly the single most important advantage immigrant parents can offer their children. This is of course true for all children, but in the case of those who migrate during childhood, the role of the home and the immediate family take on far greater significance. In a social environment such as that which most of the participants described in their lives prior to migration – close-knit neighborhoods and frequent interaction with extended family – tensions or dysfunctions within the nuclear family setting can be mitigated by the stabilizing effects of the surrounding community. For migrant families, however, the nuclear family is typically thrust with little outside support into alien surroundings. For children, the

primary source of any sense of continuity and stability in their lives is centered in the home for a period of many months and even years after migration; the safety net of a familiar extended community has mostly disappeared.

The absence of the stable home setting in a new and unfamiliar outside environment, on the other hand, can prove disorienting and overwhelming for young immigrants, particularly those who reside in low-income communities among populations of other newcomers. Children seeking attachments elsewhere can fall prey to disadvantageous social involvements such as identification with strongly oppositional perspectives, gang membership, and substance abuse – realities that several participants in this study reported having observed among their peers.

To provide some degree of continuity beyond (and in support of) the immediate family setting, it seems advisable also that migrant families settle in places where other relatives have preceded them and in enclave communities of co-ethnics. This was the case with nearly all of the participants in this study.

A further recommendation for parents is one that is perhaps less obvious: Be as forthcoming as possible to children about plans and courses of action which will greatly affect their lives. Several participants spoke of the importance of communication between them and their parents. Like the advisability of providing a stable home, a recommendation against unnecessarily concealing important information from children of course applies to all parents. But given the prevalence with which this study suggests migrant parents are prone to mislead their children about their plans and intentions, special mention here seems warranted. Parents may not appreciate how observant their

children are, nor how deeply children can be affected by the knowledge that their parents misled them about so momentous an undertaking. Though the participants almost universally spoke of their parents with admiration and respect, the notion that their parents excluded them from the decision to migrate, made little attempt to help them understand the implications of this decision, and concealed their true intentions seemed a persistent concern. In addition, no participants reported that their parents had ever attempted to explain their actions in the years since migration; several participants, in fact, expressed ongoing curiosity on this topic.

Recommendations from the Participants to Young Immigrants

Although various messages useful for immigrant children can be construed from the stories and descriptions in the interview data – most of which have, I believe, been addressed in the preceding findings chapters – participants were also asked directly if they had any advice to offer to children who, like themselves, faced the prospect of migrating to a new country and culture during mid-childhood.

Their responses were thoughtful and showed an understanding of and sympathy for children in circumstances they recalled well. Highlights are offered here with the hope that those who work with migrant children might find useful insights.

On Language, Culture, and Education

The most dominant themes in participants' advice comprised, not surprisingly, the three greatest issues any young immigrant confronts: learning the new language, learning and adapting to the new culture, and dealing with school.

Throughout his interview, Andres returned to the question of language, and in

particular the notion that speaking with an “accent” identifies one as an immigrant. He discussed his struggle to accept his own status as an immigrant and as a non-native English speaker: “Yes I have an accent and there’s things that I’m never gonna be able to change. But actually I should feel proud because I am an immigrant.” In his advice for other young immigrants, Andres re-iterated his sense of these characteristics as inescapable, and as a source of pride: “You’re an immigrant and that’s never gonna change. This country is made by immigrants, so don’t feel like the black sheep. Feel proud of being an immigrant.” At the same time, and possibly arising of his regret over resisting learning English for some time after his arrival, he emphasized the importance of learning the language as quickly as possible: “So it’s not gonna be like, ‘Oh, he’s the kid that doesn’t know how to speak the language, and then he’s sitting in the corner.’”

Nadia also focused first on language learning, and then expanded this advice to encompass other characteristics and behaviors which would support that goal: “Learn the language. And don’t be afraid of experiencing things. Not being shy, because shy is not gonna help you. You have to talk and make friends, in order to discover or get to know the culture.”

Sara and Carmen as well emphasized the importance of learning English, and they also both identified reading in particular to be of importance. Asked what she would recommend for young newcomers, Sara replied:

To learn English, to focus on English. To go to the library, study, read. To be able to understand the environment, to continue your education. To go different places, to make friends. To learn about the country, to learn about the culture.

Like Nadia, Sara progressed immediately from the instruction “learn English” to

strategies for making this happen. Carmen agreed with one of those strategies, offering the straightforward directive: “Read. Read. It’s very important.” (As might be expected in a study of successful students, several other participants – notably Jose, Francisco and Marta – also stressed the importance of reading in their lives.)

Ofelia recommended that newcomers focus on school, and also offered concrete strategies for advancement, in this case having to do with finding reliable mentoring:

It’s about education. When I came here, I didn’t know anything about school, and the benefits that we have. So one thing, if you’re going to high school, just stay with a counselor that you feel comfortable with. Find someone who can really help you.

On Being Yourself, Depending on Yourself, and Depending on Others

Echoing Andres’ admonition to “feel proud of being an immigrant,” several participants spoke of the importance of immigrant children maintaining a sense of who they were, of not losing their sense of self in the tumult of new influences.

Carmen offered the seemingly contradictory advice of staying true to self while also assimilating:

Don’t buy into, don’t think you have to be, don’t think you have to give up all your values to become American. You can still be who you are and assimilate to the culture, but don’t, don’t give up yourself to it. Don’t become the MTVer

Daniel urged newcomers to be true to themselves while also seeking out the company and inspiration of others like them:

Just don’t be afraid of being yourself. And try to look for people who... you’re not the only one. I would say you’re not the only one in that situation. There’s more students who come at that time [in mid-childhood] and they’re successful.

Veronica, meanwhile, adopted a stance which placed even greater emphasis on self-reliance, suggesting the unpleasant truth that to a certain degree the child immigrant

is on her own:

You always have to learn by yourself what to do. You can't depend on everybody. Yeah, I'm not saying, once in a while you depend on your mom, you depend on your dad, but make it be someone that already knows what you're going through.

Reminiscent of Ofelia's "Find someone who can really help you," Veronica stresses the importance of finding a sympathetic shoulder to lean on: "someone that already knows what you're going through." She quickly returned, however, to the message that ultimately one must depend on oneself: "You do what you wanna do if you wanna do it, you have to have motivation, and if you don't have somebody to motivate you, you be yourself, and try to motivate yourself."

Even while offering a strong message of self-reliance, Veronica allows that "once in a while" children need to rely on others. Finding a balance seemed to be important for others as well, who placed a value on autonomy while also urging immigrant children to know when to turn to their parents and other adults. Daniel advised: "Talk about your problems with your parents, your family. Communication is a big issue." In her trademark no-nonsense style, Carmen instructed simply: "Listen to grown-ups, because they're right."

On Perseverance and Patience

Another major theme in the advice for young migrants might be described as related to the notion of time healing all wounds, or at least smoothing difficulties. Assuming the mantle of experienced veterans, participants urged their protégés to practice patience and to apply themselves with unwavering dedication. Marta advised:

Be persistent. Being persistent and not letting go of what you want, of that goal... and be patient. For me at least it took a lot of patience to get used to new customs, a new way of living.

Lidia offered similar encouragement:

Probably I would say that if at any point in the beginning you feel that whatever is coming to you in your life, you feel you know, "I can't make it," I would tell the little kid "Give it time, give it a little bit of time."

Jose, meanwhile, was able to offer the comfort of a rough estimate of how long this waiting period might take:

It's gonna be a rough couple of years. The first two years are the roughest. But afterwards, you're really gonna enjoy it. And it's gonna work for your best interest. It's gonna be for your own good, in a way. So just hang on in the first two years, and you'll be fine.

In all of the advice offered, as outlined in the preceding subsections, the abiding tone is one of compassion combined with realism and gentle encouragement. Fully aware that to a young person, the reassurance that a difficult time will last only "a couple of years" is little reassurance indeed, Jose hastens to add: "But afterwards, you're gonna really enjoy it." He ends – and the recommendations section of this chapter ends – with a hopeful prediction for young immigrants: "You'll be fine."

Implications for Further Research

This study has provided some support for numerous assertions and interpretations that have been put forward by earlier researchers and theorists on the topic of the immigrant experience and specifically about mid-childhood immigration, while raising questions about others. The following subsections address particular questions which seem most worthy of further inquiry or most likely to yield illuminating results. Finally, a brief discussion is offered on the value of using Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) social

ecology construct in the study of mid-childhood immigrant experience.

Models for Mid-Childhood Immigrant Acculturation and Identity

What seems apparent from this study is that in matters related to the development of identity, and in the significance of the interplay between comparably strong influences from the country of origin and the country of residence, mid-childhood immigrants comprise a unique population – distinct from both younger immigrants and older – which warrants focused consideration. To date, little research has addressed mid-childhood immigrant identity specifically.

In the course of this inquiry, I have referred to numerous studies and theories in the more general area of migrant identity and adaptation. For the purpose of describing the complex phenomenon of immigrant acculturation, researchers and theorists have proposed various bi-dimensional and multi-dimensional models (Berry, 1997; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Liebkind, 2001; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). These models attempt to account for distinct and significant components of that acculturation, such as an individual's views on her ethnicity or the desirability of adaptation to the larger society. Another influential model posits "segmented assimilation," in which individuals tend toward differing types of adaptation depending upon context and influences (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Such models are given to be improvements over earlier models which perceived of acculturation in a singular and linear fashion (Phinney, et al., 2001). However, even within multidimensional models, an individual's position on a given dimension is perceived as a single point, or at least no mechanism is provided to consider or visualize this value otherwise.

Yet the data collected from mid-childhood immigrants suggest that an individual's perspective on questions of culture and identity can show considerable variation – even within the course of a single conversation.

Carmen, for example, asserted that “You can still be who you are and assimilate to the culture, but don't, don't give up yourself to it,” with no indication that she viewed this as contradictory. Jose stated that as a mid-childhood immigrant, “You don't fit anywhere” due to the need to bridge cultural differences, though elsewhere he expressed the view that Mexican and U.S. culture were quite similar. Such comfort with the ambiguity and shifting nature of identity was fairly common among participant's responses, as has been discussed at various points in the findings and in the conclusions section above which addresses this topic.

Whether this malleability of identity is typical of individuals who have undergone the transformative experience of mid-childhood migration, and whether it is unique to this group, are potentially subjects for further study.

Describing Liminality in Mid-Childhood Immigrant Identity

In “Mid-Childhood Immigrant Identity as Liminality” above, I posit a construct for conceiving this identity as one defined by a sense of being in motion between two points or stages, never truly leaving the one and never truly arriving at the other. This proposition is at this point merely a suggestion, though further inquiry might be devised to consider it more closely, to discover if it seems compelling and apt for the purpose of describing identity in this population, and to discern how it might fit among other models of acculturation and immigrant identity development.

Describing Motility in Mid-Childhood Immigrant Identity

Given the finding of this study that mid-childhood immigrant identity is defined in part by inconsistency and liminality, further work may seek to devise a means to better illustrate this characteristic – one which better allows the possibility of concurrent variability or motility within a defined identity range. (“Motility” is used here to denote movement, based upon the Oxford English Dictionary definition: “The power of active movement [...]; the degree or type of such movement.”) I believe a model which incorporates and accounts for a considerable range of motility might complement existing models and provide a useful perspective.

An example of a motility-friendly model comes not from scholarship in identity but language acquisition and assessment. Like identity, language proficiency has been seen to fluctuate within individuals depending on variables such as context, affect, and point in time. A model advanced by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (1988) offers a way to visualize and classify language proficiency by describing the various aspects of language as they manifest under different conditions as a kind of topography, within which peaks and troughs can be identified. The task of the researcher (or assessor) is to identify the extremes, or points at which maximum and minimum levels can be confidently identified in an individual’s responses. The parameters thus being determined, consideration can be focused on the question of where within that delimited range the respondent’s level seems most strongly evident. Rather than just a single point, both the range and the points of preponderance are seen as significant; a robust topography of thick peaks suggests a tendency toward the upper end

of the range while a thin, spiky topography suggests the opposite.

A similar model, it seems, might be devised to consider an immigrant's identity profile by defining the range it spans between defined characteristics and its topography within that range. However, it must be allowed that even while providing a mechanism for expressing greater complexity and movement, a range/topography model also limits consideration to that which occurs between two variables (i.e., assimilation and non-assimilation) and as such could be seen as an oversimplification of a process subject to multiple and simultaneous influences (e.g., family, social network, societal). Nonetheless, such a construct might augment the insights made possible by viewing identity through those models which have previously been employed.

Effects of Personality Change on Mid-Childhood Immigrants

Another striking finding of this study pertains to emotional and psychological effects of mid-childhood immigration, as explored in Chapter Six and under "Personality and Behavior Change in the Post-Immigration Period" above. Questions which seem worthy of further attention concern whether this period of marked isolation and withdrawal is indeed common among those who migrate in mid-childhood, and if so, the manner and degree to which this phenomenon affects their development and well-being during that period and over the longer term.

Value of Bronfenbrenner's Construct

As utilized in the execution of this study and the analysis of findings, the social ecology framework proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) was found to be useful in visualizing the development of individuals as an outcome of the interplay of smaller and

larger spheres of contact, or ecosystems, which change with the passage of time and crossing of geographic and cultural distances. But like any abstract concept devised for such purposes, while offering a means for enhancing understanding it also presents a danger of oversimplification. In particular, the neatness of the construct does not readily account for the widely divergent degrees of influence which particular parts of the larger ecosystem can exert, to the exclusion of others. Neither does it speak to the relative values of given parts of the system. For example, in this study a rather unmistakable feature observed is the primary value of the family in the young immigrant's successful negotiation of the new setting. The absence of such value-placing in the ecology model is not a shortcoming, but rather a characteristic which researchers and theorists must consider when applying Bronfenbrenner to tasks such as that described herein.

It is my belief that overall, using the Bronfenbrenner lens to consider questions of immigrant adaptation and success is useful and illuminating. This judgment is strongly supported within the context of a recent longitudinal study on development among Latino college students, in which the authors counsel researchers to apply the ecological framework in such inquiries "to emphasize the social context in which one's ethnicity is explored as a social identity within multiple layers of context (e.g., school, community, nation, and history)" and in which the objective is to "potentially provide a greater understanding of the role of context" in development (Syed, Azmitia, & Phinney, 2007, p. 175). In addition, the principles which Bronfenbrenner (1979) set forth for guiding the practice of qualitative research (e.g., considering participants' whole environments, being aware of the "plasticity" of life courses and environments, and the use of non-

manipulative research methods) seem on the evidence of the present study to be sound, relevant, practical, and prudent for application in comparable areas of inquiry.

Afterword

For many individuals, migration is an experience which in addition to disruption and challenge provides profound insight. For those who migrate at a stage of life which is marked by malleability and transformation – mid-childhood – the experience of transformation takes place in a self which is at least partially (and often acutely) conscious of the change. While younger migrants are formed by the new environment with little ability to appreciate the totality of its effects on them, and older migrants can hold steadfastly to old lifeways, those who arrive during the period when both awareness and malleability are at a peak not only undergo profound change but are conscious of what is happening: The mid-childhood immigrant's eyes are open to the power and possibility of individual transformation. This experience seems inevitably to entail a degree of trauma and displacement, but the strong impression received from close analysis of the many hours of interviews for this study is that these participants stood very solidly among the ranks of those immigrants who, as described by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), “find that overall, their gains outweigh their losses” (p. 86).

Ultimately, these are stories of people – children and their parents – who have refused to accept what was given to be their fates. Their successes, partial and in-progress as they are, are real nonetheless. They struggle against their circumstances not only in the “old country,” where they had little hope of making any significant social, economic, or educational advancement, but also in the new, where many live or have lived in

marginalized communities. Though the participants showed the marked tendency to frame their narratives as triumph-over-adversity tales, these tales might also be characterized as simply refusing-to-give-up. In most cases, through an extraordinary though not uncommon combination of determination and willingness to face considerable risks, these families have achieved a marked improvement in their living standards and in their children's prospects. In this regard, they might be seen to represent a kind of historical paradigm of the American story, one which most natives have come to see as a relic of bygone times.

Perhaps nowadays to have a reasonable chance to see your children enjoying better prospects than you could have hoped for, you have to start at the bottom, with little more than the clothes on your back. It is hard to resist the conclusion that this as much as anything may account for the disdain that so many natives now direct toward immigrants: At this point, they alone have much cause to believe in the American dream.

APPENDIX A
LETTER FROM COOPERATING INSTITUTION

[text of signed letter received from cooperating institution; masked]

February 1, 2009

This letter is in regard to a research project titled “Mid-Childhood Immigrant Perspectives on Achieving College Success,” to be undertaken by Mark Litwicki, who is a faculty member at _____ College and a student in the School of Education of Loyola University Chicago. This research is in connection with Mr. Litwicki’s doctoral dissertation, chaired by Dr. Terry Williams, and is to be completed in the calendar year 2009.

I have reviewed the application materials which Mr. Litwicki prepared for Loyola’s Institutional Review Board, including details related to his purpose, research procedures, recruitment of participants, consent, and data collection. The project involves one-on-one interviews of Latino immigrant students regarding their academic experiences and the factors which they perceive to have influenced their ability to succeed in college. The interviews will take place on the campus of _____ College. No college-provided archival data or documents about participants are being used in the research.

I am satisfied that this project will present no significant risk to participants nor to any others in the college community, and in fact I believe that the potential benefit of this research, contributing to our understanding of how best to meet the needs of Latino immigrant students, far outweighs any potential inconveniences.

With this letter, consent to conduct the research project described above is granted for a period not to exceed the present calendar year. If further clarification is needed, questions may be directed to _____.

Best regards,

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT NOTICE

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

I am doing research on college success among Latino students who immigrated to the U.S. during childhood. This research is for my doctoral dissertation at Loyola University Chicago.

If you meet the following description, you are eligible to participate in this research:

- born in Latin America, immigrated to the U.S.
- arrived in U.S. between 8 and 16 years old
- completed at least 15 credits of 100-level and 200-level college classes
- graduated or left high school not more than 5 years ago (2004 or later)
- are 18 years old or older

If you can participate, please contact me:

Mark Litwicki

E-mail: mark.study.2009@gmail.com

Phone: 708-656-8000 x1381

Participants will be asked to participate in one 90-minute interview.

Participants will receive a \$25 stipend for their time.

Please note that the researcher is a faculty member at _____ College (currently on a leave of absence and not teaching), and that participation or non-participation in this study will have no effect on your status at the college.

APPENDIX C

NOTICE TO VOLUNTEER OF NON-INCLUSION IN STUDY

[The following is the text of the notice which will be sent to those individuals who volunteer but who are not to be included in the initial round of interviewing.]

[date]

[volunteer name],

Thank you very much for your interest in participating in an interview as part of my research project titled Mid-Childhood Immigrant Perspectives on Achieving College Success.

Since more people volunteered than are needed at this time, I won't be able to interview you for the study. However, it is possible that this will change, and if it does, I will contact you again to find out if you are still available and interested.

If for any reason you need to communicate with me regarding this project, you can find my contact information below.

Thanks again for volunteering. I hope you have a great semester!

Sincerely,

Mark Litwicki
Doctoral Candidate
Loyola University Chicago

[email and phone #]

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND GUIDE

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND GUIDE

This guide is not meant as a script, but as a resource to jog the interviewer's memory regarding the topical areas that can be explored. The interviewer's task is to get participants first to offer their perspectives on the topics in whatever way they wish to respond, but then – if the participant does not move in this direction of his/her own accord – the interviewer should attempt to move them toward exploring how each topic area relates specifically to his/her academic efforts, and then more specifically to college success. Somewhat paradoxically, questions are intended to provide focus while at the same time remaining as open-ended as possible, to urge participants toward extending their responses in whatever direction they find meaningful.

SETTLING IN

Prior to the start of the interview itself, the researcher goes over the Informed Consent form with the participant and ensures understanding. In addition to the issues mentioned on the form, the researcher also explains that he will later email the participant a copy of the transcript of the interview so that the participant can be sure it is what he/she wanted to express and to give him/her a chance to add to it or make changes.

In the interest of establishing rapport and helping the participant locate himself/herself in a larger context, the researcher may then mention his own experience as a newcomer and as a university student abroad, explaining that this was part of his reason for choosing this topic of inquiry, ending: "I know what my experience was, and I've read about some other people who have been through similar experiences. And now I'd like to hear about your experience, to see what you have to add to this conversation."

OPENING QUESTIONS

These questions are intended to begin the interview focused on the overall topic while giving the participant a chance to set the direction of the conversation from the start:

- You are a college student. How did that happen?
- What brings you here, to be a college student?
- What has especially helped you to get to this point in your studies?
- What has been the biggest challenge for you in getting to this point?

BODY OF THE INTERVIEW (topics from "Foreshadowed Questions" pp. 94-96)

Topic 1: Immigration experience

Acculturation, attitudes about biculturalism • Attitudes about native and adopted cultures • Perspective on ethnicity or cultural identification • Attitudes about immigration • Type of immigration (voluntary/involuntary, one-way/transnational)

- How would you describe your immigration experience?
- When did you come to the U.S.? How did you feel about it? Why did your family move here?
- A lot of people use terms like German, Polish-Irish, African American, and so on to describe themselves. How do you describe yourself? What does that mean to you?

Topic 2: Family, community, and social networks

Family and home environment • The role of family ethnic/cultural identity and/or practices • Community/social setting • Mentors, significant persons who provided guidance

- Since you came to the US, has your family changed a lot?
- How has your home life affected your studies?
- Tell me about a person who has had a positive influence on your studies.
- How do the people in your neighborhood or your community affect your thinking about school?

Topic 3: Language and literacy

Language learning experience, bilingualism • Attitude toward first language, attitude toward bilingualism • Attitudes about English

- How did you learn English? How long did it take? What made it harder/easier?
- If someone asked you to describe your relationship with English, what would you say?
- How do you feel about being bilingual? How does it affect you?

Topic 4: Academic experiences before college

Prior schooling experience (pre- & post-immigration) • Effects of interrupted schooling • Attitudes toward school, teachers • Perception of teachers' attitudes, behaviors • Classroom behaviors and academic strategies • Role of specific courses, programs or services • Mentors, significant persons who provided guidance

- Tell me about your education before you came to the U.S. Did you go to school continuously, or did you miss some because of moving?

- Was school different here in the U.S.?
- How did you feel in your first couple of years in school here?
- What did you do to be sure you would finish high school?
- How did your teachers act in school, here in the U.S.? How did you feel about them?
- Was there any person in particular who had an influence on your studies?

Topic 5: Academic experiences at college

Attitudes toward college, teachers • Perception of teachers' attitudes, behaviors • Classroom behaviors and academic strategies • Role of specific courses, programs or services • Mentors, significant persons who provided guidance

- When did you know you were going to come to college?
- How do you feel about being in college? Is it different from what you expected?
- Tell me about your classes, your teachers.
- What do you do to be sure you will pass your classes?

FINISHING UP

As the time nears for the interview to end, the researcher asks the participant if there is anything he/she feels is important to add.

- Is there anything we didn't talk about that you think is important, that affected your ability to succeed in school, to get to this point?
- If you were talking to other people in a similar situation – people who came to a new country during their school years – what would you ask them? (Follow up: Why?)

The interview ends with the researcher ensuring that the participant has his contact information, and requesting that if the participant thinks of anything new that might be of interest, that he/she is asked to send an email or leave a voicemail. The researcher also reminds the participant that he might have some follow-up questions, and if so that he will try to contact the participant and would be very grateful if he/she could spend a few more minutes on that. Finally, that the researcher will email the participant a copy of the transcript of the interview so that the participant can be sure it is what he/she wanted to express and to give him/her a chance to add to it or make changes.

APPENDIX E
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Mid-Childhood Immigrant Perspectives on Achieving College Success

Researcher(s): Mark Litwicki

Faculty Sponsor: Terry Williams

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Mark Litwicki for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Terry Williams in the Department of Higher Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you are a college student who was born in Latin America and who came to the United States between the ages of 8 and 16.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of students who were born in Latin American and are now college students in the U.S., especially regarding what they believe contributed to or presented obstacles to their academic success.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will include the following:

- An interview on the topic of what you believe has affected your efforts to succeed in college classes (this might include your earlier education, your family and home life, people who have influenced you, your experience with learning English, your experience in college classes, etc.).
- The interview will take approximately 90 minutes and an audio recording will be made.
- You will be contacted later (by telephone or email) and invited to clarify or add to information from the initial interview.
- You may be contacted later (by telephone or email) and invited to participate in an additional brief interview with the purpose of clarifying and/or further exploring your perceptions on the research topic. You are under no obligation to participate in this additional interview.

Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Research indicates that college students can benefit from reflecting upon their learning experiences and considering which behaviors and experiences have supported their studies; thus, your participation in an interview which asks you to engage in this kind of reflection should be beneficial.

In addition, your participation may be beneficial to others: The objective of the research is to provide insights which might help guide educators in their decisionmaking regarding how best to support the academic efforts of immigrant students

Compensation:

On the day of the interview, you will receive a \$25 stipend for your time.

Confidentiality:

To protect your privacy, data from the interview (that is, the recording or a transcript of it) will be available only to the researcher and to his dissertation advisors and professional colleagues directly involved in this dissertation project. Interview recordings and transcriptions will be stored either under lock and key or password protection. Paper-based data will be shredded and electronic data will be destroyed one year after the study is complete, or within two years of collection, whichever comes first.

If any data (recordings and transcriptions) are kept for possible future research purposes, any information which can identify individuals (for example, names and other identifying details) will be deleted.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Although the researcher is an employee of _____ College, your participation in this interview – or your refusal to participate – will have no affect on your status at the college.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Mark Litwicki, at mlitwic@luc.edu or 708-656-8000 extension 1381; or faculty sponsor,

Terry Williams, at twillia@luc.edu or 312-915-7002.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

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